Prime Time and Prayer Time: Television, Religion and the Practices of Everyday Life of Marthoma Christians in Kerala, India

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been presented to any other academic institutions other than the University of Edinburgh, to which it is submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis is my own work and constitutes the results of my research in the subject.

Sham Padinjattethil Thomas
January, 2005

ABSTRACT

Prompted partly by their apparently contradictory media practices of anathematising film-going on the one hand and embracing television viewing on the other, I investigate in this thesis the interactions between television, religion and everyday life of a group of Marthoma Christian families in Kerala. I argue that an image suspicious and reformed ecclesial group like the Marthomites have accepted television and perceive that they have incorporated it without seriously undercutting their everyday life and traditional religious practices. On the strength of the presence of a few Hindu and Muslim families in this study I further demonstrate the similarity with which families of different religious persuasions watch both secular and religious television. Television, even while symbolising a culture shift for the Marthomites in terms of their use of audio-visual communication, tends to reinforce their (local) cultural and religious identities.

Taking advantage of the recent spread of television in Kerala and bringing in hitherto unheard voices of television audiences this study complements the media, religion and culture debate in suggesting that audiences in Kerala do not perceive their religion and culture to have suffered greatly by television. Using the analogy of prime time and prayer time I suggest that the relationship between television, religion and culture is more subtle and complex. Prime time (television) influences domestic religion (prayer time) but in turn is influenced by everyday life and public worship (prayer time). This thesis hence adds voice to the calls for a fresh look at theories on the influence of global media on local cultures and to those challenging some of the major voices among media and religion scholars that pronounce television to be a bane or a blessing. It also identifies the need for the Marthoma Church to have a modest and realistic engagement with television acknowledging the use of image based symbolic cultural products among her members and to rethink the role of art and images in religious imagination and communication.

This thesis is organised in three parts. In Part One the theoretical, historical and methodological framework of the study is worked out. In Part Two the primary research data generated during a four month fieldwork in Kerala is analysed. In Part Three the original research questions are revisited as part of concluding the study highlighting the major findings and their implications.

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i An autobiographical note

Television in India is a recent phenomenon and in Kerala, which is the southern most state in India, is still more recent. I was born in Kerala when television transmission had been in India for only two years. Nonetheless I belong to a pre-television generation because it was only in my mid-twenties that I started watching television. In my childhood even mass-produced visual images were scarce at home or in school; none at all in our church buildings. Instead of television or radio, my grandmother (*ammachy*) told me biblical and folk stories about origin, good and bad values, ideals and socialisation, some of which were later elaborated or repeated in the school and Sunday school. Religious beliefs defined practices of everyday life in almost all matters, from consumption to cosmetics. Each day began and ended with personal and family prayers. It was 'Sabbath' from Saturday evening until Sunday evening as far as school related work was concerned. That time was strictly set aside to learn memory verses, to attend Sunday school and church worship. Being a Christian, or a Marthomite[1] to be precise, dictated what I could consume materially and culturally. Materially, unlike my caste Hindu classmates or neighbours, I could eat non-vegetarian dishes but culturally I was not supposed to be entertained with films or traditional art forms like *Kathakali* and dances such as *Mohiniyattam*.

Audio-visual media, for instance film, as we shall see in great detail in the following chapters, was prominent among the banned cultural products. The only occasion when I had been to a cinema in my childhood was when our school had organised to see a religious film *Snapaka Yohannan*[2] and then a children's film called *Poompatta*.[3] Once I entered college in a nearby town, it was an adventure to go to the

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[1] A Marthomite is a member of the Marthoma Syrian Church of Malabar (or, in Malayalam, *Malankara Marthoma Suriyani Sabha*) which was formed as the result of a reformation in the Malankara Church in the nineteenth century. A detailed discussion of this reformation is undertaken in Chapter Two. I use the terms Marthoma and Marthomite interchangeably in this study.

[2] This film on the life of John the Baptist was directed by P. Subramaniam and released in 1963. This and other films like *Jesus* and *Masihacharithram* (Story of Jesus) were popular with many Christians in those days.

[3] Means, Butterfly. This film, released in 1971, was directed by D. M. Pottakkadu.

cinema since it was done without the knowledge not only of parents, relatives or neighbours but also of anyone who might know me from my church. Watching film was not an acceptable practice for a good Marthomite. Even today it would be a scandal if a priest or bishop was seen to have gone to a Cinema or theatre[4] in Kerala.

Things began to change with the arrival of another audio-visual medium, television. I had the opportunity to watch television from the mid-1980s, when I started my ministerial training because our theological college bought a set for our use in the hostel. It was, however, only after I was ordained in 1988 and posted to the metropolitan city of Mumbai (then Bombay) that I began to notice the spread and impact of television. It was during that time that the first Hindu epic serial *Ramayan*[5] was telecast on the public service broadcast, *Doordarshan*.[6] Though I was not able to watch it myself, I happened to be one of its beneficiaries. In Mumbai the metro trains were always overcrowded and getting in and out of the train was an acrobatics act. However, from the time the telecast of *Ramayan* began on Sunday mornings, especially from 9-10 a.m., the streets were deserted and the trains empty. Those were the only few times I ever managed to sit in the train going from one parish to another to conduct the worship service. The epic success of *Ramayan* signalled the spread of television, serialisation of many other Hindu stories and also questions concerning television and religion. On leaving Mumbai for Kerala in 1991, little did I know that television was fast becoming a household item in the small towns and the suburbs.

On the day I arrived at my new parish from Mumbai, the sexton (janitor) came to meet me and after surveying my baggage he exclaimed, "*Atchan*, have you got no TV!"[7] On hearing my response he commented, "That means, only you and I have got no TV in this parish." Later his son received some financial help for his education from a foreign agency and when that money arrived he bought a black and white television set. The following day he came and announced to me, "I also bought TV!

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[4] In Kerala cinema is popularly known as theatre and hence I use both the terms interchangeably in this work.

[5] A detailed discussion of this serial (called differently *Ramayan*, *Ramayana* and *Ramayanam,* and used as such in this study) and similar religious television programmes are discussed later in this chapter and in the next.

[6] Television in India, which was until recently a government owned and governed network, is known as *Doordarshan* which means 'distant vision.' In 1997 *Doordarshan*, called also DD, was brought under a broadcasting corporation called *Prasar Bharati*. I will discuss the introduction of television in India, in detail, in the next chapter.

[7] The clergy are addressed as *atchans* in Kerala.

Now it is only you who haven't got one." Why it was that he, and many others like him, prioritised the purchase of a television over other pressing needs (in my opinion) like the repair of his house? Was it that having a television set would enhance his prestige in the slum area where he was living?

Though it took another five years for me to have a television set of my own, that did not deter me from watching it. I found myself visiting certain families in the parish when there were special programmes on television or for the Sunday evening films if the scheduled prayer meeting was cancelled.

This was indeed strange. Marthoma Christians were apprehensive of films.[8] But we did not consider the medium of television something to be ignored or abstained from. There was no call to boycott television. On the contrary, many Marthomites went to buy sets and even started watching films on television. My mother- in-law was said to have been very strict in not allowing her son to go to a film since he was to be an ordained priest in the church. But fifteen years later she had no problem in sitting with me, an ordained minister of the church, watching a film on television! What has caused this change? How do we make sense of it?

Even though my *ammachy* is still alive, she is no longer the resident storyteller she once was. The cultural institution of *ammachies* being babysitters and storytellers is apparently being replaced by television. It may well be that *ammachies* themselves have become an active part of the television audience. One of my Catholic friends said that in the pre-television days on his parish visits he would see *ammachies* sitting in the living room with rosaries in their hands. Once television arrived, the same *ammachies* were sitting with a remote control rather than a rosary! Has television replaced religion in the households of Kerala?

To some extent it was some of these experiences and questions that prompted me to explore, in this study, the relationship between television, religious belief and the practices of everyday life. In this chapter I introduce the proposed research

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[8] It seems that Marthomites were not an exception. For instance, Sheela, one of the most popular artists of Malayalam films, revealed recently that her father was opposed to her becoming an actress. She says: "I considered cinema as *devalokam* [paradise]. But my father had considered cinema as the pit of sinners. He was a *sathyachristhyani* [devout Christian]." Sheela. 2004. *Natakam Kalichu Vannappol Acchan Thalli* (My father beaten me when I came after acting in a drama). http://www.manoramaonline.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=manorama/MalArticle/Malfullstory&cid=1091566346860&c=MalArticle&p=1009602683042&channel=MalWomen&count=6&colid=1009992851142. Accessed on Friday, August 06, 2004 at 10 hrs

explaining the context of the research and research questions, placing them within the theoretical framework of the present media, religion and culture research in India and elsewhere. I shall then describe, briefly, my methodology and the organisation of the thesis.

ii Introduction

At the centre of the lives of most Indians, regardless of whether they are Hindus, Muslims, or Christians, is religious faith and its rituals and practices. It follows, at least in India, that religion is at the heart of culture and everyday life.[9] For Indians, nothing is completely secular and nothing exclusively religious. According to Rustom Barucha there is a "real ambivalence in the contemporary Indian context, where one can be both religious and secular at the same time."[10] The separation between the religious and the secular, which was popularised in the Age of the Enlightenment, has met with resistance in India. In Europe and North America, secular is considered to be the opposite of spiritual and religious; it means worldly and material. The contrast between church and state is expressed in 'secular power,' meaning the state as a power in its own right, which does not depend on the blessing or support of the Church. In multi-religious India where according to Madan,

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[9] Religion is defined both in broader or in more focused terms in media and religion research. In this study I follow a conventional definition of religion. In this respect Newman provides a helpful starting point when he says: "We generally associate religion with a commitment to a certain kind of worldview involving metaphysical, ethical, emotive, and other elements; this commitment ordinarily is accompanied by such things as ritual practices, association with a community of believers, a sense of the "transcendent" or "supernatural," and an antipathy toward materialism." Jay Newman. 1996. *Religion vs. Television: Competitors in Cultural Context*. Westport: Praeger. p. 2. It is possible to keep the first part of this definition separate from the second in the sense that religion can be defined as a broad meaning-making or ethical behaviour without any association with conventional religious practices. For instance, see Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover, eds. 1990. *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation. I do not make, however, any distinction between the two; religion refers both to beliefs and practices. Religion refers to a sense of God, faith and religious practices in this study for two main reasons. Firstly, in India, as probably elsewhere, religion is not perceived in isolation to rituals or community of believers and institutions. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, when religion is equated with 'meaning-making' without reference to God or religious rituals virtually everything becomes religious in the media. Consequently, as Paul Peterson has rightly reminded us, the broad understanding of religion as meaning-making can become "so vague as to be largely useless." Paul C. Peterson. 2002. "Religion in *The X-Files*". *Journal of Media and Religion* 1, no. 3. p. 183. See also, Quentin J. Schultze. 1990. "Television drama as a sacred text." In *Channels of belief: Religion and American commercial television*, ed. J. P. Ferrez. Ames: Iowa State University Press. pp. 26–27

[10] Rustom Bharucha. 1998. *In the Name of the Secular: Cultural Activism in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 4

"secularism or secular is yet to be defined,"[11] these terms have come to mean that government and governance on any level should not be attached to any religion or religious institutions. India being a secular state is "neither a Godless state nor an irreligious, nor an anti-religious state."[12] Instead, secularism in the Indian context underlines "an overall attitude not only of tolerance but also of reverence towards all religions."[13] In other words, the organising principle of or "root paradigm"[14] of Indian cultures is clearly religion, and in its multi-religious context, cultural identity is often constructed on a religious basis.

There are, however, increasingly other claims on Indians' lives such as modern education and technology and more recently, the mass media of communication, especially television. Television was introduced in India in 1959.[15] Unlike the first three decades of its existence, the last fifteen years have witnessed a tremendous spread of television even to remote villages. As a result, television is fast becoming a major resource for diverse activities for a large proportion of Indians. It is believed to have influenced the lives, cultures and religions of Indians. The interactions and inter-relations between television, religion and culture are the broad field of this research.

iii Context of the research

The context of this research is Kerala, the southernmost state in India. Paul Hartmann and his team conducted substantial research on the impact of mass media on village life in India in the early 1980s. One of the three sites they selected for their research was a cluster of villages in Kerala, the others being in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. One of the findings of this team was that in Kerala Christians were

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[11] T. N. Madan. 1997. *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 244

[12] M. V. Kamath cited T. N. Madan. 1997. *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 244

[13] Ruchi Tyagi. 2001. *Secularism in Multi-Religious Indian Society*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. p. 252. Emphasis removed.

[14] For a discussion on this concept see William E. Biernatzki. 1993. "Religious Values and Root Paradigms: A Method of Cultural Analysis". In *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Chris Arthur. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

[15] I shall discuss this in Chapter One.

suspicious of film.[16] They noticed that there were instances where a church had even made its members perform public penance for going to see films.[17] For Christians, religious authorities and convictions controlled media exposure, and "Christian homes switch off the radio during evening prayer."[18]

The above research was undertaken in 1982 and television was not included in their study. Another excellent study by Joseph Velacherry on the mass media in Kerala around the same time also could not have taken television in its scope, since it was yet to spread significantly.[19] In 1982 there were only 1000 television sets in all of Kerala and the whole of India had only 1.5 million television sets.[20] Two decades later, in 2002, the National Readership Survey (NRS) found that 81.6 million Indian homes had access to television.[21] This means that television ownership has percolated from the exclusive domain of the affluent and elite members of the community[22] to all strata of society. In most places television ownership is no longer a status symbol and people of all classes own television sets.[23] "In some senses television has become the principal source of information and entertainment in most Indian homes,"[24] says Praveen Swami, even though (as noted in the 2001 census) two thirds of the Indian households are yet to possess a television set of their own.[25]

In addition to the rapid penetration of television, a change in programming has taken place since the advent of cable television in Kerala and elsewhere in India. Around 1991 entrepreneurs began to offer programmes which Indians had never seen before.

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[16] Paul Hartmann, B. R. Patil and Anita Dighe. 1989. *The Mass Media and Village Life: An Indian Study*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 86

[17] Hartmann, Patil and Dighe. *The Mass Media and Village Life*. p. 233

[18] Hartmann, Patil and Dighe. *The Mass Media and Village Life*. p. 231

[19] Joseph Velacherry. 1993. *Social Impact of Mass Media in Kerala*. New Delhi: ISPCK.

[20] Hartmann, Patil and Dighe. *The Mass Media and Village Life*. p. 284

[21] [India-ej] Indian media habits. http://www.indialists.org/pipermail/india-ej/2002-June/000267.html. Accessed on Wednesday, June 19, 2002 at 13 hrs. The NRS survey in 1999 showed that only 69 million homes had access to television at that time. Praveen Swami. 1999. "Recording Media Trends". *Frontline*, October 8. p. 105

[22] Hartmann, Patil and Dighe. *The Mass Media and Village Life*. p. 195

[23] Kirk Johnson. 2000. *Television and Social Change in Rural India*. New Delhi: Sage. pp. 164–165

[24] Swami. "Recording Media Trends". p. 105

[25] Of the 192 million households only 61 million households possess a set. Of them 26 million are in rural areas (19% of the total) and 35 million (64%) in urban areas. Deepika. www.deepika.com. Monday, June 28, 2004. Accessed at 9 hrs

They were mostly from Europe and USA, beamed to India via satellites, received by dish antennas and rebroadcast by cable operators to their neighbourhoods for a fee. This opened the way to the deregulation of the Indian television system, which until then had been the jealously guarded prerogative of *Doordarshan*, the state owned provider. The result now is a wide spectrum of mainly Indian owned (51 per cent of shares) cable stations, many of them broadcasting in Indian languages, with programmes made by Indian producers. In short, cable television has brought in a diversification of programmes and also a shift from English and/or Hindi to the vernacular languages. In Kerala there are three commercial cable channels in Malayalam,[26] in addition to the four *Doordarshan* terrestrial/satellite channels and a number of cable channels in Hindi and English. The competition between rival channels has generally led to a lighter, more popular and more film centred TV menu than was the case under the rigid rule of the state broadcaster *Doordarshan*.

iv Research questions

These developments, as I shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter, have contributed to the spread of television in India/Kerala, enabling us to ask the following questions. What are the roles which Marthoma Christians assume and presume television is playing in their lives? How do Marthoma Christians use television in their homes? Does this medium bring about any change in their attitude towards visual media and, more importantly, towards traditional religious practices? Do they differ significantly from the audiences of other religions in their use of television? How do Marthoma Christians describe their experiences with television in the context of everyday life? In which ways, if any, has television influenced the daily life of families for example, the meal and prayer schedules of families or the times of visits and attendance at church services?

These and other questions are based on the premise that even though religion plays a significant role in the lives of the Marthomites the arrival of television has the potential to make a shift in their culture and practices of everyday life.

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[26] The channels, such as *Jeevan* TV, which began transmission after I finished my field work in July 2000 are not included in this group or in the analysis. The most recent one is a digital channel named *V-Three vision* launched on January 30, 2004. Deepika. www.deepika.com. Monday, February 01, 2004. Accessed at 15 hrs

iv.i Elaboration of the questions

Some of the scholars claim that religion as the root paradigm of culture sets the hierarchy of values and thus becomes the organising factor of life in India and elsewhere.[27] The entry of television, which is another cultural institution and cultural form, necessarily raises the question of the relationship between religion and television. How religion and religious institutions relate to the media is a matter of concern. This study seeks to explore the competing and complementing and hence complex relationships between media, religion and culture in Kerala.

In a multi-religious context, identity is formed and distinguished through particular types of cultural practices. In India Christian identity was partly defined by its distinction from the Hindu- 'Other' and most cultural forms and expressions that were associated with or sponsored by the Hindu community, among them the various icons and images in the Hindu temples and Hindu popular culture. Does television, especially the government owned public broadcast *Doordarshan* with its steady diet of Hindu religious serials, accentuate the differences among various religious communities or does it open up new ways of dialogue? This question assumes not only social and religious relevance but also political significance in the present day Indian context.

It is generally assumed that the last decade witnessed a change in the attitudes of people in general and Christians in particular towards images, audio-visual forms like films and other popular culture products. There are many reasons for this change, like the emergence of secular art and cultural organisations, job opportunities in the Middle East, travel and exposure to other cultures. However the spread of television may be one of the most significant reasons for this change. With its arrival, as in other parts of the world, the life and attitudes of Christians are undergoing significant changes. Television seems to have broken their cultural boundary in providing audio-visual products, which were not accessible or acceptable before. This study looks at the various dynamics behind such media practices and seeks to explore how the shift in media shapes Marthomites' religious identity. In other words, I explore how religious identity is affirmed, negotiated and relocated by the particular consumption of television.

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[27] See for instance, Biernatzki. "Religious Values and Root Paradigms".

The long history of Christianity has contributed to distinct Christian sub-cultures, which are expressed in daily practices. For example, Christians in Kerala have been known for their daily religious rituals like morning and evening family prayers, Bible reading and songs. How have these and other religious rituals been affected by television?

The lives of Marthomites are still being shaped by their religious affiliations and ritual practices. Institutional religion plays a significant role in affirming their group identity, in maintaining their sub-culture and in constituting them as an "interpretive community."[28] The question, however, concerns the extent to which the sub-cultural identity contributes to their use of television.

v Television, religion and the practices of everyday life: Literature survey

The attempt in this study is to triangulate research on television, religion and practices of everyday life. This is because of my conviction that television viewing and its interaction with religion cannot be separated from the viewing context. Stewart Hoover provides a helpful starting point in noting that "religion and media …are meeting on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experience."[29] Put

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[28] Interpretive community refers to a group which has certain strategies of interpretation in common. See, Daniel A. Stout and David W. Scott. 2003. "Mormons and Media Literacy: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Media Education". In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage. London: T& T Clark. p. 146. However, Stout and Scott wrongly use the phrase 'interpretative community' and cite it to Lindlof who uses 'interpretive community.' Cf. Thomas R. Lindlof. 1996. "The Passionate Audience: Community Inscriptions of The Last Temptations of Christ". In *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations*, ed. Daniel A. Stout and Judith A. Buddenbaum. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 152. (The title of this article has varied styles both in the contents page of the book and in the article page. It has, 'The Last Temptations of Christ' in italics in the former and 'Community Inscriptions of' italicised in the latter). For a discussion on interpretive community, see also, Stanley Fish. 1980. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Klaus Bruhn Jensen. 1990. "Television Futures: A Social Action Methodology for Studying Interpretive Communities". *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7, no. 2, Kim Christian Schrøder. 1994. "Audience Semiotics, Interpretive Communities and the 'Ethnographic Turn' in Media Research". *Media, Culture and Society* 16, no. 2.

[29] Stewart M. Hoover. 2002. "Introduction: The Cultural Construction of Religion in the Media Age". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 2

simply, reception[30] of television cannot be isolated from the social and cultural environment of the family or the rituals and routines of everyday life.[31]

v.i Television reception and everyday life

With the "qualitative turn"[32] in media research signalling a shift from the text centred effect research to the audience centred reception analysis, television reception and everyday life have become the focus of such research.[33] The mid 1970s witnessed this shift to audiences, which was in Charlotte Brunsdon's words, "A clear move in interest from what is happening on the screen to what is happening in front of it."[34] With this, the emphasis shifted from mediation of the text to the reception of the audience as the site to investigate the power of television in everyday life.[35]

Both in theory and method, audience research (or reception analysis) challenges the effect research model that dominated media research until the mid 1970s.[36] Theoretically, it initiated the "participative turn"[37] towards the audiences in

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[30] Audiences are conceptualised as receivers in this study only to distinguish them from the producers and distributors of television programmes. I do not use the category 'reception' to imply any passive consumption by the audiences.

[31] Cf. David Morley. 1992. "Electronic Communities and Domestic Rituals: Cultural Consumption and the Production of European Cultural Identities". In *Media Cultures: Reappraising Transnational Media*, ed. Michael Skovmand and Kim Christian Schrøder. London: Routledge. p. 79

[32] Klaus Bruhn Jensen. 1991. "Introduction: The Qualitative Turn". In *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*, ed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski. London: Routledge.

[33] For a discussion on the etymology and the concept of audiences, see the various works of Ang. Ien Ang. 1989. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge, Ien Ang. 1991. *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge, Ien Ang. 1996. *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. London: Routledge. See also, Lawrence Grossberg. 1988. "Wandering Audiences, Nomadic Critics". *Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3, Denis McQuail. 1997. *Audience Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, Janice Radway. 1988. "Reception Study: Ethnography and the Problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects". *Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3, Andy Ruddock. 2001. *Understanding Audiences: Theory and Method*. London: Sage.

[34] Charlotte Brunsdon. 1991. "Text and Audience". In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*, ed. E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner, and E. Warth. London: Routledge. p. 121. See also, Robert A. White. 1987. "Television as Myth and Ritual". *Communication Research Trends* 8, no. 1. p. 6

[35] Roger Silverstone. 1994. *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge. p. 142

[36] Ellen Seiter suggests that both media effects research and audience analysis represent U.S. mass communication research and British cultural studies paradigm respectively. In her opinion, "[The] conflict between so-called 'ethnographic' audience researchers and mass communications researchers involves a generation gap, a disciplinary split, and a continental divide." See, Ellen Seiter. 1999. *Television and New Media Audiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 9, p. 14

[37] Jolyon Mitchell. 2003. "Emerging Conversations in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture". In *Mediating Religion*, ed. Mitchell and Marriage. p. 337.

emphasising them as active in negotiating with the media messages using their cultural capital and interpretive resources rather than being "vulnerable and passive non-agents."[38] The theoretical ground for the shift from "effect" to "audiences" was provided by Stuart Hall in proposing various possibilities of reading such as preferred reading, negotiated reading and oppositional reading.[39] On this basis the audience studies or reception theorists came to argue that "audiences may arrive at entirely different constructions of meaning than the 'preferred' reading. Different groups make sense of content in different ways."[40] Methodologically audience analysis emphasised the move from content analysis and quantitative survey to qualitative and ethnographic methods like interview and participant observation.[41]

It was researchers like James Lull and David Morley who pioneered this shift in television research. What they noticed was the role the domestic context and power structure play in watching television. In other words television viewing, it is affirmed, is not simply an individual affair or a mere interaction between the viewers and television, but is an active social process. Hall argues:

> Television viewing, the choices which shape it, and the many social uses to which we put it, now turn out to be irrevocably active and social processes. People don't passively absorb subliminal 'inputs' from the screen. They discursively "make sense" of or produce "readings" of what they see. Moreover, the "sense" they make is related to a pattern of choices....which is constructed within a set of relationships constituted by the domestic and familial settings in which it is taking place.[42]

Retrospectively, Morley's study reported in *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* can be considered as a pioneering work in the study of television

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[38] Shohini Ghosh. 1999. "The Troubled Existence of Sex and Sexuality: Feminists Engage with Censorship". In *Image Journeys: Audio-visual Media and Cultural Change in India*, ed. Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher. New Delhi: Sage. p. 240. See also, John Elridge, Jenny Kitzinger and Kevin Williams. 1997. *The Mass Media and Power in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz. 1990. *The Export of Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For a suggestion of audience as "co-author", See Michael R. Real. 1996. *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide*. Communication and Human Values. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. xviii

[39] Stuart Hall. 1980. "Encoding/Decoding". In *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson.

[40] A. Silverblatt. 1995. *Media Literacy:Keys to Interpreting Media Messages*. New York: Prager. p. 33

[41] I shall discuss these methods in Chapter Three.

[42] Stuart Hall. 1986. "Introduction". *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. David Morley. London: Comedia. p. 8

audiences in the domestic context.[43] By moving away from his own previous study of audience response to specific television content[44] Morley emphasised the importance of the viewing context in this study of television audiences. Though his study on the television viewing of 18 families in South London was criticised by many including Morley himself,[45] it was a milestone in audience studies in showing that gender and domestic power relations have a bearing on television viewing.[46]

Among the various audience studies which followed the study of *Nationwide,* Dorothy Hobson conducted ethnographic research among women who watch the soap *Crossroads*, finding the different ways in which programmes are viewed and incorporated into everyday life by women. She proposed that television viewing has to be understood as "part of the everyday life of viewers."[47] Similarly, Lull doing research in America and China used participant observation methods to study the television viewing in the domestic context.[48]

Besides focusing on domestic context, some of these studies shifted the focus from individual viewers to the consideration of the family as a viewing unit.[49] As Morley has rightly proposed, "the basic unit of consumption of television [should] be the family/household rather than the individual viewer."[50] Of course, with the

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[43] Morley. *Family Television.*

[44] Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley. 1978. *Everyday Television: "Nationwide"*. London: British Film Institute.

[45] David Morley. 1992. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge. pp. 178–179, David Gauntlett and Annette Hill. 1999. *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge. pp. 285–286

[46] Paddy Scannell. 1990. "Editorial". *Media, Culture and Society* 12, no. 1. p. 6. For a brief overview of the approaches to the study of audiences, see Shaun Moores. 1990. "Texts, Readers and Contexts of Reading: Developments in the Study of Media Audiences". *Media, Culture and Society* 12, no. 1, Radway. "Reception Study". For a detailed review see, Graeme Turner. 2003. *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge. Morley's study has been influential in directing the course of audience research and some researchers followed his research literally to the point of interviewing 18 families. For instance, see Shaun Moores. 1996. *Satellite Television and Everyday Life: Articulating Technology*. London: J. Libbey.

[47] Dorothy Hobson. 1982. *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen. p. 110

[48] James Lull. 1990. *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television Audiences*. London: Routledge. See also, James Lull. 1980. "The Social Uses of Television". *Human Communication Research* 6, no. 3, James Lull. 1982. "How Families Select Television Programmes: A Mass Observational Study". *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 26, no. 4. James Lull. 1991. *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance*. London: Routledge.

[49] See various studies in James Lull, ed. 1988. *World Families Watch Television*. Newbury Park: Sage.

[50] Morley. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. p. 138

proliferation of sets and the possibility of each family member having separate television sets, viewing can become an individual affair. However, even then, it is not a purely individual affair as it is viewed in the domestic context with its own politics. Hermann Bausinger contends that even a seemingly solitary activity like reading a newspaper is not done in isolation as it is read in the context of the family, friends and colleagues.[51] The influence of the domestic context becomes all the more when we consider the fact that even the "physical structure of the house has a deterministic effect" on the way television is watched.[52] Television viewing, audience studies have emphasized, is a complex and dynamic process. It is enigmatic as audiences are not empty vessels.[53]

In addition to the emphasis on the influence of collective viewing and the domestic context on the use of television, audience studies have forcefully advocated the need for considering television viewing as part of everyday life which, according to Janice Radway, is an "endlessly shifting and ever-evolving kaleidoscope."[54] As Bausinger argues:

> The surrealism of our media world does not merely consist of the content of the media, but includes all the bewildering interplay of intentional and unintentional acts of deliberate and incidental actions related to the media, to people, to the environment—the whole opaque panoply of the everyday.[55]

In other words these new approaches to research emphasised what Roger Silverstone calls "the *experience* of television"[56] rather than its effect. The audience researches are discussed extensively,[57] hence it is sufficient to note, for the purpose of this

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[51] Hermann Bausinger. 1984. "Media, Technology and Daily Life". *Media, Culture and Society* 6, no. 4. p. 350

[52] David Morley and Roger Silverstone. 1990. "Domestic Communication-Technologies and Meanings". *Media, Culture and Society* 12, no. 1. p. 33. See also, John Fiske and John Hartley. 1978. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen. pp. 109–110

[53] Justin Lewis. 1991. *The Ideological Octopus: An exploration of Television and Its Audience*. New York: Routledge. pp. 9–10

[54] Radway. "Reception Study". p. 366

[55] Bausinger. "Media, Technology and Daily Life". p. 351

[56] Silverstone. *Television and Everyday Life*. p. 2

[57] See for instance, Shaun Moores. 1993 (reprint 1995). Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption. London: Sage, Ang. *Watching Dallas,* Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living,* John Hartley. 1992. *Tele-ology: Studies in Television*. London: Routledge, Lewis. *The Ideological Octopus,* Morley. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies,* Virginia Nightingale. 1996. *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real*. London: Routledge, Silverstone. *Television and Everyday Life,* White. "Television as Myth and Ritual", Robert A. White. 1994. "Audience "Interpretation" of Media:

research, that apart from the importance given to the audiences in the process of communication, these studies have recognised the crucial role of the viewing context and everyday practices in understanding television use. In conceptualizing audiences as agents who relate with television in a variety of ways rather than always being its victims and in contextualising television viewing in everyday life, audience studies have done a great service to mass communication research.

Audience research, however, is not without its share of problems. Many scholars rightly caution against celebrating the total freedom with which audiences negotiate television.[58] They also question the possibility of mapping everyday life exhaustively in any particular study. For instance, Ien Ang calls the efforts to capture everyday life comprehensively in relation to media "radical contextualism," and suggests that it is something impossible to achieve. Moreover, it may also paralyse media research.[59] She forcefully states "our incapability to be everywhere at the same time," and points to the need to make conscious choices about the contextual frameworks and political choices in doing audience research.[60]

Perhaps the impossibility of exhausting the practices of everyday life may explain the near absence of any reference to religious practices in most of the audience studies of television. Religion has been the "blind spot" in most of these studies which have addressed the everyday practices in their interaction with television and discussed issues of power, gender and generation in terms of television viewing.[61] In many such studies (undertaken mainly in the West) religion has appeared, if it has at all, only as part of the demographic data or as a secondary issue. Consequently, "the role of religiosity in everyday life" is not adequately reflected in such research.[62]

Emerging Perspectives". *Communication Research Trends* 14, no. 3, James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg and Ellen Wartella, eds. 1996. *The Audience and its Landscape*. Boulder: Westview Press.

[58] See for instance, Klaus Bruhn Jensen. 1990. "The Politics of Polysemy: Television News, Everyday Consciousness and Political Action". *Media, Culture and Society* 12, no. 1, J. Lewis. 1999. "Reproducing Political Hegemony in the United States". *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 16.

[59] Ang. *Living Room Wars*. p. 69

[60] Ang. *Living Room Wars*. p. 78

[61] Stewart M Hoover and Shalini Venturelli. 1996. "The Category of 'the Religious': The 'Blindspot' of Contemporary Media Theory?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 13.

[62] Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum. 1996. "Introduction: Toward a Synthesis of Mass Communication Research and Sociology of Religion". In *Religion and Mass Media*, ed. Stout and Buddenbaum. p. 6

v.ii Television and religion

Research in television and religion is relatively recent. On reviewing the literature on religion in the mass media, William Biernatzki confesses that he had to depend more on conference reports and individual opinions than on "hard research." "One reason for this," he remarks, "is that, apart from the dedicated attention of a relatively few scholars, little 'hard research' is being done on this topic."[63] Similarly, Judith Buddenbaum and Daniel Stout report that their survey of 17 top journals in mass communication and sociology yielded only "59 articles since the end of World War II that provided any data on the relationship between religion and mass media use in the United States or Canada.[64]

This lack of attention to religion in media research has probably been the result of an excessive focus on the content of television and its effect. Lynn Schofield Clark and Stewart Hoover suggest that media scholars failed to recognise religion primarily due to a scholarly misconception that "reduced religion to its institutionalized and bureaucratized forms on the one hand, or to its privatized and idiosyncratic practices on the other."[65] Both of these approaches marginalise religion in the public sphere. They also suggest that "part of the problem lies in a tacit acceptance of the theory of secularization which suggests that as societies and cultures become more rational, the social significance of religion will decline."[66] Clark, who provides a helpful overview about the history of media, religion and culture research, especially in the context of the United States, suggests what she calls "protestantization" in media research as another reason for the apparent neglect of religion.[67] Though the

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[63] William E. Biernatzki. 1995. "Religion in the Mass Media". *Communication Research Trends* 15, no. 2. p. 29

[64] Judith M. Buddenbaum and Daniel A. Stout. 1996. "Religion and Mass Media Use". In *Religion and Mass Media*, ed. Stout and Buddenbaum. p. 14

[65] Lynn Schofield Clark and Stewart M. Hoover. 1997. "At the Intersection of Media, Culture, and Religion: A Bibliographical Essay". In *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 16

[66] Clark and Hoover. "At the Intersection of Media, Culture, and Religion". p. 16. See also, Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover. 1990. "Introduction". In *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions*, ed. Robert Abelman and Stewart M. Hoover. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation. p. 5. For some of the reasons for the neglect of religion by Cultural studies in Britain, see Graham Murdock. 1997. "The Re-Enchantment of the World: Religion and the Transformations of Modernity". In *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Hoover and Lundby. See also Jim McDonnell. 1993. "Religion, Education and Communication of Values". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur.

[67] Lynn Schofield Clark. 2002. "The "Protestantization" of Research into Media, Religion, and Culture". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Hoover and Clark.

particular choice of this word is not explained, she uses it to denote the separation of intellectual enquiry as an exclusive endeavour divorced from any religious aims on the one hand and the "cultural norm of religious tolerance and relativism in the context of a U.S. society that is increasingly pluralistic" on the other.[68]

However, since the late 1980s, especially with the "electronic church" phenomenon in the United States, there have been critical studies on television and religion.[69] Some of them, for instance Hoover[70] and Peter Horsfield,[71] place the electronic church in the wider socio-religious context of U.S. Protestantism and its revivalist traditions. Such efforts to examine the interaction between television and religion have become more focussed in the last decade, especially in the United States, making it a distinct field of research.

Evidence of this is a proliferation of academic conferences and colloquia and the resultant publication of some significant literature.[72] Hoover and his associates, among others, organise conferences and research projects in this regard. The meeting/conferences held in Uppsala (1993), Boulder (1996) and Edinburgh (1999) have deliberated issues of media, religion and culture.[73]

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[68] Clark. "The "Protestantization" of Research into Media, Religion, and Culture". p. 8

[69] The term "electronic church" was initially used by Fore to refer to "those programmes that present a preacher and a religious service and that are aimed at creating a strong, loyal group of followers to that preacher and service." William F. Fore. 1979. "The Electronic Church". *Ministry*. January. p. 5 cited, Stewart M. Hoover. 1982. *The Electronic Giant: A Critique of the Telecommunications Revolution from a Christian Perspective*. Elgis: Illinois: The Brethren Press. pp. 117–118. For some of the characteristics of electronic church and a critique, see Quentin J. Schultze. 1990. "Defining the Electronic Church". In *Religious Television*, ed. Abelman and Hoover. For a critique of the term, electronic church, see Stewart M. Hoover. 1990. "Ten Myths about Religious Broadcasting". In *Religious Television*, p. 36.

[70] Stewart M. Hoover. 1988. *Mass Media and Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church*. Newbury Park: Sage.

[71] Peter G. Horsfield. 1984. *Religious Television: The American Experience*. New York: Longman.

[72]For instance, Everette E. Dennis, ed. 1994. *Religion and the News: A Conference Report*. New York: The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Robert Lewis Shayon and Nash Cox. 1994. *Religion, Television and the Information Superhighway: A Search for a Middle Way, Conference Report*. Philadelphia: Waymark Press. See also, Philip J. Roosi and Paul A. Soukup, eds. 1994. *Mass Media and Moral Imagination*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, Paul A. Soukup, ed. 1996. *Media, Culture and Catholicism*. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward.

[73] The publications from these conferences are, Hoover and Lundby, eds. *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Hoover and Clark, eds. *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, Mitchell and Marriage, eds. *Mediating Religion*.

These along with other relevant literature show that scholars try to categorise the relationship between television and religion in different ways. For instance, Stewart Hoover and Knut Lundby describe them as, Rallies, Rituals, and Resistance [74] while Jolyon Mitchell, used the categories Iconoclasts, Iconographers, and Interpreters.[75] I shall use simpler terms like polemic, apologetic and dialogic approaches in the following discussion.

v.ii.i Polemic approach

A cursory glance at the literature reveals that a major contingent of media scholars and Church leaders adopt a polemic attitude towards television. They argue that television is detrimental to religion or at least undermines religious or humanistic values and family life. Although they vary in their emphases, the dominant argument is that television, by either promoting values that discredit religion or by usurping the traditional roles of religion, makes religion redundant. Some of the very titles of their works are indicative of this polemical approach. For Tony Schwartz, media assumes manipulative powers that can replace God.[76] In a similar and sophisticated way Arthur Asa Berger emphasises the disruptive forces of television that affect all spheres of life.[77] Jib Fowlers and Marie Winn single out the drug-like effects of television.[78] The danger to family life is what Donald Wildmon highlights.[79] The tone to this polemicist approach was sharpened largely by Neil Postman who discusses the negative effects of television and its influence on education and culture in general.[80] Church magazines and leaders echoed these sentiments portraying

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[74] Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. 1997. "Introduction: Setting the Agenda". In *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Hoover and Lundby. pp. 7–8

[75] Jolyon Peter Mitchell. 1997. Preaching in an Audio-visual Culture: Lessons for Homiletics from a Study of Selected British and American Religious Radio Broadcasters. PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh. pp. 120–125. See also, Gregor Goethals. 1993. "Media Mythologies". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur.

[76] Tony Schwartz. 1981. *Media: The Second God*. New York: Random House.

[77] Arthur Asa Berger. 1980. *Television as an Instrument of Terror: Essays on Media, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

[78] Jib Fowlers. 1982. *Television Viewers vs. Media Snobs: What TV does for People*. New York: Stein and Day, Marie Winn. 1977. *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Children, and the Family*. New York: Grossman.

[79] Donald E. Wildmon. 1985. *The Home Invaders*. Wheaton: SP Publications.

[80] Neil Postman. 1986. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Penguin.

television as a competitor or threat to religion and domestic piety.[81] Alton Motter puts this dramatically: "Grace at the table or family devotions must compete with Charlie McCarthy. And in many homes Charlie wins out!"[82]

While some authors consider television to be antagonistic to religion, a few others analyze the role of television in relation to that of religion. Goethals[83] argues that television is performing a quasi-religious role and "draws ordinary individuals" throughout the world "into extraordinary occasions, offering what traditional religion once provided."[84] William Fore, though sensitive to audio-visual culture,[85] argues that television is propagating certain myths that are contrary to gospel values.[86] In a similar vein, George Gerbner and Kathleen Connolly suggest that television, in its ritualized and repetitive dramatization of symbols, roles and values, plays a role similar to popular religion and has largely replaced the Church as a source of meaning and as a universal interpreter of the world.[87]

Religion and media are pitched as competitors and interestingly religion is seen as the victim in almost all such studies.[88] Like all polemicists these scholars assume traditional religion as pure and pristine and blame television for its decline or loss of

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[81] For an analysis of how a magazine like *Christian Century* had taken a polemic stance towards television, see Michele Rosenthal. 2002. "'Turn it off!': TV Criticism in the Christian Century Magazine", 1946-1960. In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Hoover and Clark.

[82] Alton M. Motter. 1951. "Back to the Kefauver TV Show". *Christian Century*, May 9. p. 584 cited in Rosenthal. "Turn it Off!". p. 145

[83] Gregor Goethals. 1981. *The TV Ritual: Worship at the Video Altar*. Boston: Beacon, Gregor Goethals. 1990. *The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion and the Making of Meaning*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

[84] Goethals. "Media Mythologies". p. 26

[85] William F. Fore. 1987. *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture*. Minneapolis: MN: Augsburg Pub. House.

[86] William F. Fore. 1990. *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture, and Media*. New York: Friendship Press. See also, William F. Fore. 1993. "The Religious Relevance of Television". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur, Dorothee Sölle. 1993. "'Thou Shalt Have No Other Jeans Before Me'". In *Religion and the Media*.

[87] George Gerbner and Kathleen Connolly. 1978. "Television as New Religion". *New Catholic World*, no. 221. pp. 52–56. Cf. Hilary Kingsley. 1988. *Soap Box: The Papermac Guide to Soap Opera*. London: Papermac. p. 335, Neil Simpson. 1993. "Popular Religion on TV". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur. p. 109. See also, George Gerbner. 1984. *Religion and TV*. Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, George Gerbner and Larry Gross. 1976. "Living with Television: The Violence Profile". *Journal of Communication* 26.

[88] For a suggestion that religion and television are enemies as "they have an affinity for each other," see Charles E. Cole. 1986. "Editorial: Television and Religion". *Quarterly Review* 6, no. 3. p. 9

appeal to significant sections of the society. In short, they follow the old dictum: kill the messenger of bad news.[89]

v.ii.ii Apologetic approach

Those who rally around television are mostly religious broadcasters including the televangelists. They consider television to be a tool or instrument which can be used for either good or ill. These broadcasters consider electronic media, especially television, to be a blessed instrument for spreading the gospel in the apocalyptic end days and portray it in biblical terms.[90] For example, Ben Armstrong goes to the extent of saying that the angel prophesied in the Book of Revelation (14: 6) might actually be a communications satellite proclaiming the gospel from the heavens to the entire world.[91] Obviously, apologists hail television only to the point of its serving their purposes. Otherwise it is considered as bad and evil. In other words, many of these broadcasters swing in their approaches to television from embracing it to antagonism.[92] In the United Kingdom, one of the religious broadcasters who advocates a critical use of television is Colin Morris.[93] His sophisticated approach is not based on academic research but on a lifetime of observations and practical experiences in broadcasting.

There are a number of authors who take issue with the criticism from religious scholars and opinion leaders. They include Steven Starker who resents the moralising stance of television's critics and their ecclesiastical backers.[94] On the other hand, some of them, like Jay Newman, propose that television is basically performing a prophetic ministry *vis-à-vis* religion.[95] Newman considers religion and television, as forms and experiences of culture, to be "competitors" and argues for the need for

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[89] William Small. 1970. *To Kill a Messenger: Television News and the Real World*. New York: Hastings House.

[90] Jerry Falwell and Elmer Towns. 1971. *The Church Aflame*. Nashville: Impact Books.

[91] Ben Armstrong. 1979. *Electric Church*. Nashville; TN: Thomas Nelson.

[92] For a discussion of this ambivalent attitude, see Quentin J. Schultze. 1996. "Evangelicals' Uneasy Alliance with Media". In *Religion and Mass Media*, ed. Stout and Buddenbaum.

[93] Colin Morris. 1984. *God-in-a-Box: Christian Strategy in a Television Age*. London: Hodder and Stroughton.

[94] Steven Starker. 1989. *Evil Influences: Crusades Against the Mass Media*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

[95] Newman. *Religion vs. Television*.

religion to understand television and be challenged by it. Duncan Forrester emphasises this by saying that mass media are "a challenge rather than a threat."[96]

v.ii.iii Dialogic approach

The third approach to television is a middle way between the polemic and the apologetic approaches. The proponents of this approach share the concern of polemicists, but differ from them in their proposal for action. In other words, even though they are sceptical about television they argue for an engagement with the medium rather than boycotting it. The most important response to television in their view is media education or media literacy. I will discuss this in the next section.

The above categories do not exhaust all the approaches to television. For example, there are responses of Christians towards television on a denominational basis. Paul Soukup identifies five approaches among Catholics towards media. These "judgements" which require concomitant action by the church and mass media can be categorised as, (1) Sceptical and agitational (2) Invitational and discerning (3) Mass Media as a site (4) Mass Media as an institution and (5) Mass Media as an instrument. Soukup's analysis is primarily focussed on the Catholic Church in the United States and mass media are taken as a single category, without isolating television.[97] In a similar way the assembled work of Stout and Buddenbaum, contains several chapters by various authors describing perspectives of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals and fundamentalists towards mass media.[98] Franz-Josef Eilers documents the official position of the Catholic Church and the paradigm-shifts from polemical to apologetic attitude to television and the mass media.[99] This collection of documents not only includes those of the Vatican, although they are in the majority, but also statements of local Catholic churches.

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[96] Duncan B. Forrester. 1993. "The Media and Theology: Some Reflections". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur. p. 67

[97] Paul A. Soukup. 1996. "Media, Culture and Catholicism: Introduction". In *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, ed. Soukup. pp. ix–x

[98] Stout and Buddenbaum, eds. *Religion and Mass Media*. A pioneering audience study in this regard incorporating Jews, Catholics and Protestants is, Everett C. Parker, David W. Barry and Dallas W. Smythe. 1955. *The Television-Radio Audience and Religion*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

[99] Franz-Josef Eilers. 1997. *Church and Social Communications: Basic Documents*. Manila: Logos Publications.

v.ii.iv Actions towards television

As there are divergent approaches to television there are conflicting proposals for actions that might or should be taken to "reform" television. Some polemicists advocate boycotting television, since it "is inherently bad."[100] In the early 1980s various conservative leaders in the United States announced plans to "clean up television" with an organisation called "Coalition for Better Television."[101] Others, for example C. Melchert, propose "inoculation" as the appropriate response against media that are antagonistic against religion.[102] Malcolm Muggeridge, on the other hand, argues that television medium is not conducive to the communication of the gospel.[103] The polemicists argue that the church should discourage the use of television.[104]

Those who are 'convenient users,' who suggest that television is good as far as they use it and bad otherwise, would argue that infiltrating the media sphere and offering religious values as a counterpoint to the media culture is the desired response. Religious broadcasters like Armstrong are proposing this mode. The Catholic Church is also veering towards the idea of using television as a blessed tool for Christian witness. In India the recent biennial conference of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India held in January 2004, for the first time chose 'Mass Media and Church' as its main theme of deliberation and reiterated its commitment to use means of social communication for the spread of the "good news."[105] Some of these proponents of television seem to reflect the optimism expressed by Quentin Schultze, that television is an "electronic Trojan horse" which can be transformed into "chariots of grace."[106] Some Catholic documents, cited above, also express the same optimism.[107]

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[100] Guy Lyon Playfair. 1990. *The Evil Eye: The Unacceptable Face of Television*. London: Jonathan Cape. p. 10

[101] Hoover. *The Electronic Giant*. p. 139

[102] C. Melchert. 1994. "TV: A Competing Religion". *PRISM: A Theological Forum for the UCC.*

[103] Malcolm Muggeridge. 1977. *Christ and the Media*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. See also, Virginia Stem Owens. 1980. *The Total Image, or Selling Jesus in the Modern Age*. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, David F. Wells. 1993. *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

[104] Jacques Ellul. 1985. *The Humiliation of the Word*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

[105] Deepika. www.deepika.com. Sunday, January 25, 2004. Accessed at 20 hrs

[106] Quentin J. Schultze. 1992. *Redeeming Television: How Television Changes Christians and How Christians can Change Television*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. p. 15. See also, Quentin J. Schultze. 1990. "The Place of Television in the Church's Communication". In *Changing Channels:*

Those who propose a dialogical relationship with the mass media emphasise media awareness, namely, the development of critical viewing habits and appropriate actions of advocacy. Hoover captures this when he says:

> No one who wishes to develop expertise in the disciplines of teaching, ministry, counselling, or even parenting will be able to consider themselves prepared unless they have also dealt with the development of basic media awareness, consumption and advocacy skills.[108]

The two authors who give a detailed account of this approach and describe the skills involved are James Potter[109] and Michael Warren.[110] Some of the other scholars who describe the basic propositions of media education and practical exercise include Len Masterman,[111] Alvardo Manuel[112] and Carey Bazalgette.[113]

A few scholars examine the responsibility of the Church in audio-visual culture.[114] Modern media, Forrester argues, can liberate theology from its mono-media reductionism of relying only on words. "Media can trigger and strongly assist important styles of theological renewal, deepening the understanding of the Gospel and the church, and presenting opportunities of Christian communication in the modern age which are in fact given by God."[115] Similarly a number of contributors in Soukup's book propose that the audio-visual language and culture spearheaded by television has to be taken seriously in theological education and ministerial

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The Church and the Television Revolution, ed. Tyron Inbody. Dayton: Whaleprints. For a discussion on why church is reluctant to use television, see Tyron Inbody. 1990. "Introduction: Coke Bottles, Oxen and Utopias". In *Changing Channels*.

[107] For instance, Communio et Progressio. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_23051971_communio_en.html.

[108] Hoover. *The Electronic Giant*. p. 155

[109] James W. Potter. 1998. *Media Literacy*. London: Sage.

[110] Michael Warren. 1997. *Seeing Through The Media: A Religious View of Communications and Cultural Analysis*. Harrisburgh: Trinity Press International.

[111] Len Masterman. 1985. *Teaching the Media*. London: Comedia.

[112] Manuel Alvardo. 1987. *Learning the Media: An Introduction to Media Teaching*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

[113] Carey Bazalgette. 1991. *Media Education*. London: Hodder and Stoughtom.

[114] See James McDonnell and Frances Trampiets, eds. 1989. *Communicating Faith in a Technological Age*. London: St. Paul Press, Tex Sample. 1998. *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

[115] Forrester. "The Media and Theology". p. 77. Also see, Michael Suman, ed. 1999. *Religion and Prime time television*. Westport: Praeger.

formation.[116] Horsfield cautions that the absence of visual arts, music, drama, dance and audio-visual modes of communication in theological education not only impoverishes education, but also inculcates in future ministers a pattern of communication which is carried into practical ministry.[117] The faculty members of United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, add their voice to this approach. They propose the need and strategies to look at television, assesses its problems and possibilities so that theological education, church thinking and acting can be reformed in order to use television positively in the future by the mainline Protestant churches.[118] All these scholars accept the reality of living in an audio-visual culture and look at the challenges it poses to traditional modes of communication in the church, for example in preaching. Mitchell proposes that, just as radio broadcasters had to adapt to audio-visual culture, spearheaded by television, preachers have to develop the ability to use verbal pictures.[119] While most of these scholars look at the challenges and possibilities that the mass media, especially television, offer to religion, at least some others suggest that media studies can learn from theology as well.[120]

The above survey of literature reveals that while audience studies excluded religion, studies on television and religion excluded audiences and their lived world from the purview of its analysis. The focus of the religion-television debate was heavily slanted towards 'technology' or 'texts' of television and its effect on the audiences. Typical of the theoretical underpinnings of the "effect" school, the concern was mainly with the influence of television on family or religion rather than on the audiences who make use of television. Audiences are considered vulnerable needing caution, protection and ammunition, except perhaps when they watch the televangelism![121]

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[116] Soukup, ed. *Media, Culture and Catholicism.*

[117] Peter G. Horsfield. 1993. "Teaching Theology in a New Cultural Environment". In *Religion and the Media*, ed. Arthur.

[118] Inbody, ed. *Changing Channels.*

[119] Jolyon P. Mitchell. 1999. *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark. See also, Derek C. Weber. 1993. Preaching to be Heard in a Television Age: A Study of the Homiletical Response to the Modern Media Context. PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh.

[120] Lynn Schofield Clark. Building Bridges between Theology and Media Studies. http://207.69.203.69/english/clark2.htm. Accessed on Friday, March 02, 2001 at 16hrs

[121] There are few exceptions postulating audiences as active. I shall discuss them shortly.

v.ii.v Religious audiences and television

There have been attempts to address mass media from a religious audience perspective.[122] Some of them addressed the television viewing habits of audiences of different theological persuasions or denominational affiliations. For instance, in the United States Neal Hamilton and Alan Rubin studied the media behaviour of conservative and non-conservative audiences.[123] Buddenbaum and Stout on the other hand studied audiences on a denominational basis.[124] They contend that religious affiliations affect viewing selection. Outside the U.S. some scholars like Alf Linderman have studied the influence of religious television and its effect on church attendance. He categorises audiences on the basis of their church attendance—regular church goers, occasional church goers and those who were unable to attend worship services—and their corresponding response to religious television.[125]

Similarly, Robert Wuthnow, Robert Abelman and Stewart Hoover discuss the viewers of religious programmes and provide various perspectives on the religious television audience based on three investigations conducted simultaneously in the early 1980s in the U.S.[126] Abelman suggests that religious audiences can be categorised in a similar way to the secular viewers as "ritualized" viewers and "instrumental" viewers. He proposes an additional category of exclusively religious audience namely, reactionary viewers or "curiosity seekers."[127] The ritualized are habitual viewers and high consumers of television. Instrumental viewers are more analytical, less religious and more educated. The curiosity seekers, according to him,

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[122] For instance see, Hoover. *Mass Media and Religion*, Stout and Buddenbaum, eds. *Religion and Mass Media*

[123] Neal Hamilton and Alan Rubin. 1992. "The Influence of Religiosity on Television viewing". *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 3.

[124] Judith M. Buddenbaum. 1996. "Mainline Protestants and the Media". In *Religion and Mass Media*, ed. Stout and Buddenbaum, Daniel A. Stout. 1996. "Protecting the Family: Mormon Teachings about Mass Media". In *Religion and Mass Media.*

[125] Alf Linderman. 2002. "Religious Television in Sweden, Toward a More Balanced View of its Reception". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Hoover and Clark.

[126] All the three studies are in Abelman and Hoover, eds. *Religious Television.*

[127] Robert Abelman. 1990. "Who is Watching for What Reasons?". In *Religious Television*, ed. Abelman and Hoover. pp. 101–105. For a critique of Abelman, see Ronald L. Grimes. 2002. "Ritual and the Media". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Hoover and Clark. pp. 225–226. For a discussion on Media rituals, see Nick Couldry. 2003. *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach.* London: Routledge. The assumption behind the conceptualisation of media as ritual is explained by Karin Becker. 1995. "Media and the Ritual Process". *Media, Culture and Society* 17, no. 4.

are those who consume religious programmes either because of their dissatisfaction with the secular television programming or because of the scandals about religious broadcasting.

A number of observations can be made from this literature survey for the purpose of this present study. Firstly, most of these studies were done in the United States and very little research has been done elsewhere.[128] Secondly, religion assumes a monolithic character in many of these studies having in its purview only one religion (Christian) and its programmes. Thirdly, the audiences are categorised mostly on the basis of their viewing explicitly religious television. How they view non-religious programmes is left unexamined. For instance, can the habitual viewers of religious programmes act in the same when watching non-religious programmes? How does the church attendance or lack of it relate to the viewing of non-religious programmes? In short, the everyday context of the audiences and their full interaction with television are conspicuous by their absence in much of the television-religion debate. The question of watching television in a multi-religious and multicultural context is not explored at all in this debate.

This leaves several questions worth exploring: What is the interaction between television, religion and everyday life in a multi-religious context? How is television watched in a culture where religion and its practices are visible and strong unlike in contexts where they are presumed to be on the decline? How do audiences who consider themselves religious view the explicitly religious and non-religious programmes of television? What are their reactions when the explicitly religious programmes are not of their own religion? I shall address these questions in the present study by bringing in research done in a new context, that is, India.

vi Television research in India

In India, apart from a few attempts to look at television and religion, there is yet to emerge any substantial research. One of the pioneering efforts in this regard was a textual study of the Hindu epic serial *Mahabharat*.[129] In this study, Ananda Mitra

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[128] Some of the few exceptions are, Linderman. "Religious Television in Sweden", Knut Lundby. 1998. *Longing and Belonging: Media and the Identity of Anglicans in a Zimbabwean Growth Point*. Report Series- 34. Oslo: Dept. of Media and Communication, University of Oslo.

[129] Ananda Mitra. 1993. *Television and Popular Culture in India: A study of the MAHABHARAT*. New Delhi: Sage.

argues that through this religious serial the government controlled, secular television is propagating the hegemony of a North Indian Hindu-Hindi India as normative culture in this multi-religious and multicultural country. John Vilanilam goes one step further to complain that television is promoting a two-fold cultural invasion in India. On the one hand, it portrays the culture of the "global shopping centre"[130] and on the other hand the majority (Hindu) community is trying to impose its cultural norms and peculiarities on the rest of the population. Because of this cultural synchronisation from without and cultural nationalism from within, he cautions that television is adding to the "process of the destruction of the intrapersonal religious base of the culture in the region."[131]

Mitra, however, concedes that audience research is needed to probe further into the cultural role of television.[132] He also suggests that:

> Given the diversity of the television audience in India, it is important to develop a set of frameworks to identify the various contradictory elements in the audience. The four vectors—language, region, religion, and gender— can perhaps be the key modes along which the audience is structured.[133]

Even though Mitra's call for audience studies has not been followed up as such, except for some studies at the master's level at various theological colleges and university departments, research on media and religion has been emerging as an area of enquiry since the early 1990s.[134] The various contributors in Lawrence Babb and Susan Wadley's book have shown how images in print media, audio recordings and audio-visual media have transformed religious life in India.[135] Philip Lutgendorf specifically analyses the impact of the television serial *Ramayana* on the religious

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[130] John V. Vilanilam. 1996. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television: From SITE to Insight to Privatisation". In *Contemporary Television: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. David French and Michael Richards. New Delhi: Sage. p. 78

[131] Vilanilam. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television". p. 78

[132] Mass Communication Research in India was mainly oriented towards "effects" research. For some of the reasons, see Sunita Vasudeva and Pradip Chakravarty. 1989. "The Epistemology of Indian Mass Communication Research". *Media, Culture and Society* 11, no. 4. pp. 423–430

[133] Mitra. *Television and Popular Culture in India*. p. 180

[134] For instance, J. Maggie. 1996. Uses and Gratifications of Cable Television: A Case Study Among Housewives in Thiruvananthapuram. Master of Communication and Journalism Thesis, University of Kerala, K. L. Vineetha. 1999. Television Programme Viewing Preferences of Asianet Subscribers in Thiruvananthapuram City. Master of Communication and Journalism Thesis, University of Kerala.

[135] Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley, eds. 1995. *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

and cultural life of India.[136] In a related study Christiane Brosius looks at the role of the iconography of audio-visual media in the *Hindutva* movement.[137] All these studies can be called 'electronic temple' research since they focus on Hindu religion in line with the electronic church research conducted in the West. Other religions like Islam or Christianity are conspicuous by their absence in all of these studies. Methodologically these studies are either centred on the text or on the process of production leaving the audiences out of the purview of analysis.

However, there have been a few audience studies as well. J. S. Yadava and Usha Reddi, and Neena Behl were among the first to conduct ethnographic studies on television viewing in everyday life.[138] Mary Gillespie has done a similar study among Hindu Diaspora community in West London. Using audience research she looks at how cultural identities are being formed and transformed through media consumption and throws light upon the domestic religious culture through the use of Hindu religious epics. She shows how audio-visual texts come to be viewed as sacred, integrated into traditional patterns of domestic worship. She concludes that they serve as didactic resources used by parents to foster religious and cultural traditions, and are used by young people to explore the philosophy of their cultural heritage.[139] Again, the audiences here are exclusively Hindus.

Apart from these works, other ethnographic studies or social surveys with audiences exclude religion from its purview. For instance, Kirk Johnson examines the role of television in rural India based on an ethnographic study in Maharashtra in Western India.[140] He shows how television is becoming part of the social, economic and cultural life of rural people. In spite of his participant observation method, Johnson, surprisingly and somewhat mysteriously, fails to notice the religious life of the rural people and television's impact on religion. In the same way, Nilanjana Gupta's social survey with households in West Bengal does not take religion into account despite

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[136] Philip Lutgendorf. 1995. "All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context". In *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia.*

[137] Christiane Brosius. 1999. "Is this the Real Thing? Packaging Cultural Nationalism". In *Image Journeys*, ed. Brosius and Butcher.

[138] J. S. Yadava and Usha V. Reddi. 1988. "In the Midst of Diversity: Television in Urban Indian Homes". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. Lull, Neena Behl. 1988. "Equalising Status: Television and Tradition in an Indian Village". In *World Families Watch Television.*

[139] Marie Gillespie. 1995. *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change.* London: Routledge. p. 24

[140] Johnson. *Television and Social Change in Rural India.*

her intention to record the "process of negotiation that takes place in the act of viewing television."[141]

In short, the discussion so far reveals a problem in the current television research in India. As elsewhere, in most of the studies in India, television texts receive prominence over the audiences. On the other hand the very few audience studies on television and religion are exclusively based on Hindu religious programmes and their Hindu audiences in the Hindi-speaking Central and North India. Other religious communities like Muslims or Christians and other regions like Kerala are yet to appear in such studies. I have not come across any research on television from a Christian perspective or on the use of television by Christians. Published non-research works in this category adopt a negative approach to television and advocate media education.[142] One journal, *Madhyamabodhi* [Knowledge of Media], has been published in Malayalam since 1995 by a Catholic group from Ernakulam, featuring articles on such issues as 'Children and Television,' 'Media and Corruption,' 'Stereotyping in Media,' 'Sex and Violence,' and 'Advertising and Consumerism' with the intent of providing media awareness.

The present research, while acknowledging the contributions of the above studies towards television scholarship in India, attempts to complement them by filling part of the above void in the media, religion and culture debate. This is achieved by focusing mainly on a group of Malayalam speaking (*Malayalee*), Marthoma Christians in Kerala, who constitute an unexplored audience linguistically, regionally and in terms of religion. Methodologically, by listening to the appreciation, apprehension and response of select Marthoma, Hindu and Muslim audiences to television, this research contributes to audience studies in India. This research assumes all the more importance since India is at a cross-road where media, especially television, is blamed as a means of commercial capitalism and cultural nationalism.

Currently, there is research taking place elsewhere which is similar to the present study in its emphasis on the audience perspective and the relationship between religion and television. For instance, the Life course project initiated at the

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[141] Nilanjana Gupta. 1998. *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 112

[142] Nettiyadan. 1997. *Madhyamangal Anudina Jeevithathil* (Media in Everyday Life). Thiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithy.

University of Colorado four years ago[143] looks at questions of meaning-making in people's homes and in their everyday lives in the United States. However the religion, media and culture debate takes a different turn in India. Religion and religious institutions like Temple, Church or Mosque are still relevant and have a currency in public space in India. Religion is a reality for most of its people. So this study recognises that theoretical constructs, which are made in situations where religion and culture had different functions, may not be strictly applicable to the Kerala context. In other words this study does not presume that television has been substituted for the functions of religion or has become a major resource of religious meaning for the Christians in India.

However this study is undertaken on the premise that the television set, acquired in recent years, has become part of the domestic sphere of the Marthomites in Kerala. Kerala/India is uniquely suited for this type of research to map the entry of television into the households and its incorporation into the everyday lives of people because these are still the early days of television viewing when compared with Europe or America. By attempting to understand the ways in which a modern medium like television is accepted, negotiated and/or incorporated into the religion and culture of the Marthomites, this study will complement other research in the area of television, religion and culture.

vii Methodology

I have followed an audience analysis methodology. The research for this study was undertaken during four-month's field research in Kerala from April to July 2000. I explain, in detail, the processes of data collection and analysis in Chapter Three, hence it is sufficient to mention here that ethnographic interviews were conducted with twenty families. Of them fifteen were Marthomites, three were Hindus and two Muslims. Families belonging to three different religious traditions are included in recognition of the multi-religious context of India and specifically to understand the television viewing behaviour of the Marthomites in relation to their neighbours of other religions. The interviewed families are from three areas in central and south

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[143] For details of this project, see Symbolism, Media, and the Lifecourse. www.colorado.edu/Journalism/MEDIALYF. The publications from this research project include, Lynn Schofield Clark. 2003. *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane F. Alters. 2004. *Media, Home, and Family*. New York: Routledge.

Kerala, namely Kottayam, Thiruvalla and Thiruvananthapuram. Since I am a native of Kerala the interviews were conducted in our first language, Malayalam. The families were prompted to talk about their experiences with television in interaction among themselves and with me around a set of themes formulated before hand. In other words, the interviews were semi-structured and open ended. All together there were 88 interview participants from among the twenty families.

viii Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in three parts. Part I sets the background, Part II analyses the field data and Part III reflects on the study and its possible implications.

The three chapters in Part I provide the historical, cultural and methodological background necessary for this study. Having laid the theoretical framework in this introduction, in Chapter One, I map three major milestones in the development of television viewing in India. The proliferation of channels, programmes and the decline in community viewing are suggested to have helped the emergence of television viewing as a domestic television practice in India. It is my contention that this development necessitates and justifies a study of television in the domestic context and its interaction with the practices of everyday life.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the Marthoma Christians in Kerala. By tracing their formation as part of a communication revolution in the Malankara Church, their religious and cultural practices and selective media use before the arrival of television I demonstrate how Marthomites living in a multi-religious and multicultural context adapted and accommodated various cultural and religious practices while affirming their aversion to images in church. This provides a reference point to mark the culture shift that television brings into their everyday life on the one hand and a clue to the way they incorporate it into their domestic context on the other.

In Chapter Three, I introduce the research process and the research participants. The research process includes a theoretical justification for using a qualitative method like the ethnographic interview, the choice of the families, the administration of research and the transcription of the filed data. Besides giving a brief profile of each of the twenty participant families, I also reflect on the strength and weakness that my religious status (as an ordained Marthoma priest) has brought into the research

interviews. This chapter links the background chapters in Part I with the analytical chapters in Part II.

The four chapters in Part II present what can be called a cultural and "religious anthropology"[144] of the television audiences in Kerala. The interview transcripts are analysed around four major themes in this section: arrival of television into the domestic context, television viewing practices, television and the practices of everyday life, and, television and religion.

In Chapter Four, I mark the arrival of television into the households, its acceptance and consequent influence on the media use at home. I demonstrate that Marthomites have accepted television without any religious problem unlike another audio-visual medium, namely cinema (films). I also analyze the various reasons for and processes through which the families purchased a television set. Examining the use of newspaper, radio, films, audio and videocassette players by the families both before and after the purchase of a television set I show that since the arrival of television the use of all other media has been radically altered. I argue that this symbolises a culture shift for the Marthoma families.

In Chapter Five, I investigate how the families watch television in their domestic context. I demonstrate in this chapter that television is perceived as a family medium and television viewing has emerged as a family practice shaped largely by the domestic context and preference for certain television contents. I argue that contextual factors like family composition, work of the family members and public worship condition television viewing of the Marthomites. By analysing the channels/programmes watched and avoided, and the conflicts on viewing I also suggest that television is considered to be a principal medium of information and entertainment which reinforces their cultural tastes, religious preferences and domestic power structure.

In Chapter Six, I discuss the interaction between television viewing practices and the practices of everyday life. Analysing various practices like sleeping, eating, shopping, visiting and chatting with others, in relation to television, I argue that Marthomites like other families in this study seem to have received television into their everyday life with varying degrees of accommodation and adaptation.

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[144] Stewart M. Hoover. 1997. "Media and the Construction of the Religious Public Sphere". In *Media, Religion, and Culture*, eds. Hoover and Lundby. pp. 287–288

In Chapter Seven, I explore the interaction between television and religion in the domestic context. I analyse perceptions of various issues regarding the religious roles of television, viewing of religious programmes of one's own and of others, and suggest a difference in the way in which secular and religious programmes on television are watched. I argue that religious television, unlike secular television, reinforces the religious identity of the families whereas secular television exerts varying degrees of influence on the domestic religious practice.

Part III offers the conclusions of this thesis for which I revisit the initial research questions gleaning their answers from the preceding discussion. I highlight that Marthomites, like the Hindus and Muslims in this study, claim to have incorporated television into their everyday life without seriously compromising their religion and culture. What is also emphasised is the surprising similarity among audiences of different religions in their approach to and use of television. In addition, I suggest the need for further research acknowledging the culture shift of Marthomites towards audio-visual communication in their everyday lives.

I argue in this thesis that in certain respects television symbolises a culture shift in the lives of the Marthomites but in certain other respects television is incorporated into their everyday life and its religious and cultural framework. For instance, I shall argue that on Sundays, public worship time (religion) gets priority over prime time (television) in the Marthoma households. On weekdays prime time (television) is influenced by children's studies (every day practice) but in turn influences prayer time (religion). The choice of the phrases 'prime time' and 'prayer time' in the title of this thesis is meant to symbolise this shift and accommodation in the relationship between television, religion and everyday life in the Marthoma households.

Television viewing has come a long way in India and it appears that it has come to stay as part of domestic life. Everyday life and daily practices influence its viewing and in turn it influences everyday practices. The extent to which this happens may vary from family to family or from place to place. That means, audience studies are required to make sense of television in different contexts and my attempt here is to explore and understand the perceptions of a few families in Kerala.

Part I
Setting the context

Chapter One
Development of Television Viewing in India

1.1 Introduction

Television viewing in India is forty-five years old. It is a multifaceted story of various paces, shapes and shades. For the first three decades, television was the exclusive domain of the government owned *Doordarshan*, sharing space with satellite and private cable television since only 1991.[1] My purpose in this chapter is not to recount the whole story comprehensively or chronologically, but to map out the major milestones in the emergence of television viewing as a domestic practice. It will then provide an historical framework for the present study by showing that television viewing in India is becoming a nationwide, everyday and domestic communication practice.

There are various studies and analyses, from different perspectives, on the growth and development of Indian television, its problems and future challenges. Former directors of All India Radio (*Akashvani*) (of which television broadcasting was a branch until1976) such as P.C. Chatterji,[2] have written television history from an institutional perspective, while scholars like Ananda Mitra,[3] have analysed the history and development of textual genres in *Doordarshan*. Some others, following the critical school in media studies, analysed Indian television either from a political economy[4] or cultural imperialism[5] perspective highlighting the challenges television

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[1] Satellite and cable television are almost synonymous in India, as cable television is the major distribution system for satellite television in most parts of the country. Accordingly, I shall use the names interchangeably in this study. The number of families using their own dish antenna is negligible and therefore irrelevant. See, Namita Unnikrishnan and Shailaja Bajpai. 1996. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 119

[2] P. C. Chatterji. 1987. *Broadcasting in India*. Case Studies on Broadcasting Systems. New Delhi: Sage, H. R. Luthra. 1986. *Indian Broadcasting*. New Delhi: Government of India, M. Masani. 1985. *Broadcasting and the People*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, K. S. Duggal. 1980. *What Ails Indian Broadcasting?* New Delhi: Marwah Publications.

[3] Ananda Mitra. 1993. *Television and Popular Culture in India: A study of the MAHABHARAT*. New Delhi: Sage.

[4] Keval J. Kumar. 1998. "History of Television in India: A Political Economy Perspective". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia: Political, Economic and Cultural Implications*, ed. Srinivas R. Melkote, Peter Shields, and Binod C. Agrawal. Lanham: University Press of America. See also Manjunath Pendakur. 1991. "A Political Economy of Television: State, Class, and Corporate Influence in India". In *Transnational Communications: Wiring the Third World*, ed. Gerald Sussman and John A. Lent. Newbury Park: Sage.

faces in India. While drawing on the many insights of these institutional, textual or channel based accounts, I attempt to construct a television history from an audience perspective emphasising the developments in three key areas of television viewing namely, television channels, television programmes and the viewing context.[6]

I shall proceed in three sections. In the first section I focus on the increase in channels. Three milestones, namely Terrestrial television, Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) and commercial cable television were important in the process of television broadcasts growing from a localised single channel experiment to a nationwide multichannel enterprise and are highlighted in this section.

In the second section I focus on the contents of viewing. Over the years the duration of television programmes has grown from a bi-weekly 20-minute telecast in Hindi to round-the-clock programmes in many channels and languages. The three markers identified in this development are the addition of programmes from science to films, sports to sacred soaps, and from Hindi to regional languages.

In the third section, I analyse the change which occurred in the viewing context. I suggest that for many years after its introduction, television viewing was a school or community activity. This has changed radically over the last few years making television viewing a domestic communication activity for an increasing percentage

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[5] John V. Vilanilam. 1996. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television: From SITE to Insight to Privatisation". In *Contemporary Television: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. David French and Michael Richards. New Delhi: Sage.

[6] Since other commentators have dealt with the organisational history of television, system related issues and policy questions they are not analysed in this chapter. See footnotes 2 to 5 for relevant literature. See also the home page, *Doordarshan*. http://www.ddindia.com and Stephen D. McDowell. 1997. "Globalization and Policy Choice: Television and Audiovisual Services Policies in India". *Media, Culture and Society* 19, no. 2. For a brief discussion on the political motivation behind the expansion of television and useful references, see Peter Shields. 1998. "Putting Media Policy in its Place: The Example of STAR TV and the Indian State". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote et.al. pp. 89–94. For the broadcasting bill granting autonomy to television and the problems ensuing, see Andrew Woodfield. 1998. "The Obligation to Provide a Voice for Small Languages: Implications for the Broadcast Media in India". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, pp. 116–118. I shall exclude the various issues of 'television effects' on politics, religious fundamentalism and consumerism and also the debate on the effects of satellite television on *Doordarshan* broadcasting, or that of globalisation of media on national cultures and identities. For interesting discussions on some of these and related issues, see Sevanti Ninan. 1995. *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, Vilanilam. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television", Srinivas R. Melkote, B. P. Sanjay and Syed Amjad Ahmed. 1998."Use of STAR TV and Doordarshan in India: An Audience-Centered Case Study of Chennai City". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote et.al. See also the various contributions in Michael Traber, ed. 2003. *Globalisation, Mass Media and Indian Cultural Values*. Delhi: ISPCK.

of the one billion people of India. The process of this shift from class-rooms/community halls to domestic space is analysed in this section.

I argue in this chapter that because of the developments in the conduits and contents of television and the shift in the viewing context television viewing has become an everyday domestic practice for a large section of people in India. This, of course, does not mean that television has reached everywhere in the country or that all people have access to television. There are still large sections of people who cannot afford television sets and there are great differences from one State to another in the country. There are many pockets which television signals have yet to reach and there are places where television is still viewed through community sets. *Doordarshan*, which claims to be the 'world's largest terrestrial network,' still has another 10% of the Indian population to reach.[7] In Kerala, where this research focuses on, only 67.5% of the urban and 41% of the rural households have a television set of their own. In spite of the imbalances that remain, the development of television viewing in India, in less than half a century, is spectacular. According to John Vilanilam, this is unprecedented. He claims that, "of the various media, it is the TV which registered the most sudden and spectacular growth in India."[8]

1.2 Television channels

This growth has not been steady or uniform for most of the early years. As Namita Unnikrishnan and Shailaja Bajpai rightly say, "the evolution of television into a medium of consequence has been painfully slow and has been characterised by long periods of stagnation and sudden flurries of activity."[9] When television viewing began it was a local affair. What changed this was technological or hardware development along with political, economic and social policy decisions and machinations. As a result there is a proliferation of *Doordarshan* and satellite channels. There are three important phases in this development.

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[7] DD India. http://www.ddindia.com/dd_about.html. Accessed on Friday, December 10, 2004 at 22 hrs

[8] John Vilanilam. 1989. "Television Advertising and the Indian Poor". *Media, Culture and Society* 11, no. 4. pp. 486–487

[9] Unnikrishnan and Bajpai. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. p. 37

1.2.1 Terrestrial television (1959–1975)

Television viewing began accidentally in India. In 1959 a multinational company, Philips (India), used a transmitter at an industrial exhibition in Delhi. Afterwards the transmitter was offered[10] to the government of India.[11] Using this 500-watt power transmitter and a few cameras, All India Radio started to telecast from makeshift studio at *Akashvani Bhavan*, New Delhi, on September 15, 1959.

Only those within the radius of a few kilometres[12] from Delhi were able to witness this first telecast. For another decade television viewing was confined to the capital city and its surroundings. This was not just a teething problem. It took thirteen years for television to reach a second city, Mumbai, in 1972. Other cities like Kolkotta, Chennai,[13] Amritsar, Srinagar and Lucknow[14] had television stations by 1975. However, a state like Kerala had to wait for twenty-six years to get its first television centre (*Doordarshan Kendra*) in its capital city, Thiruvananthapuram.

There were many reasons for this slow development.[15] Primarily, television was judged a luxury. The then leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, considered it to be an expensive toy for India and were also concerned about the under-utilisation of Radio.[16] However, there was a growing consensus on the 'potential' of television as a

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[10] According to Kumar it was offered at a reduced cost, while Ninan suggests it as a gift. See Keval J. Kumar. 2000. *Mass Communication in India: Third Completely Revised and Updated edition*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House. p. 203, Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 18

[11] The role of Philips Corporation in the introduction of television in India assumes significance against its background of pressurising the Dutch government to start an experimental television from 1951 in Holland. For details, see Liesbet Van Zoonen and Jan Wieten. 1994. "'It Wasn't Exactly a Miracle': The Arrival of Television in Dutch Family Life". *Media, Culture and Society* 16, no. 4. pp. 644–645

[12] According to *Doordarshan 99* the reach of the transmitter was twenty-five kilometres while Kumar puts the same at forty kilometres. See B. S. Chandrasekhar, ed. 1999. *DOORDARSHAN 99*. New Delhi: Audience Research Unit. p. 3, Kumar. *Mass Communication in India*. p. 203

[13] Then Calcutta and Madras respectively.

[14] It is not lost on certain commentators that a political compulsion lay behind the establishment of centres like Srinagar (Kashmir) and Amritsar (Punjab) in the boarder states with Pakistan where people were able to catch transmissions from Pakistan especially during the war in 1971. In Kashmir, the government provided community sets to hundreds of villages. See Luthra. *Indian Broadcasting*. pp. 412–414.

[15] Ninan characterises the first two decades of television as marred with '*adhocism*.' "As and when a foreign government or an international agency came forward with a gift or equipment either the total transmission time was increased or some additional telecasts began, or another bunch of TV sets was installed to create another constituency of viewers". Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 20

[16] David Page and William Crawley. 2001. *Satellites over South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 53

medium for development in a country like India[17] which in the long run prepared the ground for important experiments like SITE.

1.2.2 Satellite television (1975–1990)

SITE was a major milestone in television history in India since it paved the way for television signals to reach a large number of villages. This pilot project of UNESCO was conducted from August 1975 to July 1976 and was the first experiment with satellite technology in India, by courtesy of the Application Technology Satellite (ATS-6), provided by the United States under a bilateral agreement.[18] It was an experiment to provide a system test of the concept of satellite television, and one of the experiments—the first of its kind—was the simultaneous broadcast of two languages along with picture.[19] It was with SITE that television viewing began in two thousand four hundred villages in various states; Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan. Each of the six direct reception clusters of SITE received some programmes specifically made for them and also a half hour common programme. Thus SITE facilitated a further reach of television to various parts of India and also proved the technological possibility of simultaneous nationwide broadcasts. This was increased again in 1977, immediately after SITE, when terrestrial transmitters were put up as SITE continuity projects in various cities (Jaipur, Hyderabad, Rajpur, Gulbarga, Sambhalpur and Muzaffarpur) to extend television coverage to a population of more than 100 million.[20]

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[17] Chatterji. *Broadcasting in India*. p. 52, Nilanjana Gupta. 1998. *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 19

[18] SITE has prompted many studies, mostly from a system perspective and a few from the programme and audience perspectives. The latter include Bella Mody. 1978. "Lessons from the Indian Satellite Experiment". *Educational Broadcasting International* 11, no. 3, K. E. Eapen. 1979. "The cultural component of SITE". *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 4, Bella Mody. 1979. "Programming for SITE". *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 4, S. Shukla. 1979. "The Impact of SITE on Primary School Children". *Journal of Communication* 29, no. 4. See also, Arbind Sinha. 1989. "A Holistic Approach to Communication Research: An Alternative Methodology". *Media, Culture and Society* 11, no. 4. According to Eapen, many SITE evaluations "have ended up patting the technology rather than seriously assessing the performance, a self fulfilling prophecy." K. E. Eapen. 1983. "Communication Technology". *Communicator* 18, no. 2. p. 29. For a similar critique, see Arvind Rajagopal. 1993. "The Rise of National Programming: The Case of Indian Television". *Media, Culture and Society* 15, no. 1. p. 95

[19] This is claimed by Chander and Karnik as "a critically significant step given the cultural diversity of India is taken to account." Romesh Chander and Kiran Karnik. 1976. *Planning for Satellite Broadcasting: The Indian Instructional Television Experiment*. Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 78. Paris: UNESCO. p. 11

[20] Kumar. *Mass Communication in India*. p. 205

The post-SITE years witnessed the introduction of a regular satellite link through INSAT–IA between Delhi and other transmitters.[21] Consequently in 1982 the first national level broadcast became possible and people from various parts of the country were able to watch television. Colour television was also introduced in 1982. However, it was ASIAD, the ninth Asian games in November and December of the same year that became an important threshold in the history of television. During that time, "daily telecasts, mostly in colour, were relayed over the forty-one transmitters which then constituted the network."[22] With ASIAD television became a national phenomenon and opened the era of live coverage of sports and games. ASIAD also ushered in a period of proliferation of transmitters. During the period 1983–85, there was a Low Power Transmitter inauguration every other week, and soon the number of transmitters shot up to 250.[23] As a result, by the end of 1985, 53 percent of the population was covered by the television network.[24]

The mid-1980s marked the introduction of a second broadcasting channel in the four metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkotta. Indicative of its exclusive reach to the metropolis, it was called Metro channel and it broadcast in the evenings. These four terrestrial channels were later linked, in 1993, through satellite to provide an exclusive entertainment channel which was to be extended further. By the end of the 1990s Metro channel was available terrestrially to 56 cities, and then to other parts of the country through dish antennas. However, until the end of 1980s, the majority of Indian viewers had to be content with only one television channel and for limited broadcast hours. What changed this scenario dramatically was the arrival of cable television.[25]

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[21] Information Bureau, Government of India. http://pib.myiris.com/refer/article.php3?fl=B3774&sr=11#. Accessed on Monday, November 19, 2001 at 14 hrs

[22] Chatterji. *Broadcasting in India*. p. 55

[23] Vilanilam. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television". p. 63

[24] Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers. 1989. *India's Information Revolution*. New Delhi: Sage. p.66

[25] The advent of satellite television has immediate consequence for the whole region of South Asia in increasing the viewing choices. See Page and Crawley. *Satellites over South Asia*. p. 20

1.2.3 Commercial cable television (1991–2004)

Private cable television altered and broadened television viewing in an unprecedented way in India. It began when American Cable News Network (CNN) started reporting the Gulf war (1991)[26] which had generated much anxiety and interest in India with so many Indians being immigrant workers in the Gulf region. Since then the reach and number of cable television has been steadily increasing, especially with the launch of the satellite, ASIASAT–1.

In April 1991, Satellite Transmission Asia Region (STAR)[27] began offering five twenty-four hour channels to 52 Asian countries including India.[28] In no time this became popular with the English-speaking audiences. But it was Zee TV, launched in September 1992, which led the expansion of cable television in India with programmes in Hindi competing with the English programmes of STAR television.[29] In the same year *Asianet*, a Malayalam satellite channel, was launched signalling the advent of Indian regional language channels.[30] The following years saw the introduction of various other language channels like Jain TV, Sun TV and ATN changing the entire spectrum of television viewing. By the end of 1994, barely three years after the introduction of cable television, parts of India had access to as many as 25 channels.[31] Unlike the slow progress of the government controlled *Doordarshan*, the spread of private cable television was very fast. For instance, there

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[26] Cable television was available to the lower middle class localities in the bigger cities of Gujarat and Maharashtra even in 1984 and in the high rise apartments and hotels in Delhi. It was considered initially to be a cost-effective alternative to watching borrowed videocassettes of feature films. However it was the advent of satellite television, which came in as a result of the deregulation of Indian economy, that propelled an unprecedented and huge growth of cable television along the length and breadth of the country.

[27] For a detailed history of the STAR TV and other satellite channels in India, see Sandhya Rao. 1998. "The New Doordarshan: Facing the Challenges of Cable and Satellite Networks in India". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote et.al, Geetika Pathania. 1998."Response to Transnational Television in a STAR-struck Land: Doordarshan and STAR-TV in India". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*.

[28] Unnikrishnan and Bajpai. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. p. 97

[29] The history of Zee TV and the impact of globalisation on Indian media is discussed in Daya Kishan Thussu. 1998. "Localising the Global". In *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance*, ed. Daya Kishan Thussu. London: Arnold.

[30] For a brief history of *Asianet* channel, see K. L. Vineetha. 1999. Television Programme Viewing Preferences of Asianet Subscribers in Thiruvananthapuram City. Master of Communication and Journalism Thesis, University of Kerala.

[31] Mathew K. M., ed. 1995. *Malayala Manorama Yearbook 1995*. Kottayam: Malayala Manorama Company Limited. p. 603

were only 6000 cable operators when it began in 1991 but their number shot up to 12, 5000 in two years.[32] In response to cable television,[33] *Doordarshan* also launched its own satellite channels, especially ten Regional Language Satellite Channels (RLSC) including, RLSC Malayalam, known as DD4.

The spread and proliferation of terrestrial television and satellite based broadcasting coupled with cable narrow casting during the last decade of the twentieth century was such that by 2004 there are more than 100 channels available in many parts of India. There is also a corresponding increase in the reach of television signals. For instance, *Doordarshan* network alone has the technical capacity to reach 87.9% of the population and 74.8% percent of the nation.[34] Television viewing, in short, is increasingly becoming a normal activity for the majority of the nation.

1.3 Television programmes

Obviously, the proliferation of channels meant more programmes. 'Development', not 'choice' of programmes, was the catchword when telecasts began. Television, then, was considered to be a magic medium for development communication,[35] hence the priority in its programming being development and education. As Chatterji observes, "the social education for farmers and educational programmes for children were the initial objectives of experimental television in India."[36] Slowly, there was a two-fold growth: in the duration and diversification of programmes.

1.3.1 Science to films

It would be a great surprise for young viewers of today to hear that the first generation viewers only saw occasional telecasts. Television began with a 20-minute programme on two days a week, Tuesday and Friday evenings. It took another six years for *Akashvani* to begin a regular one-hour daily telecast. During the early years,

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[32] Kumar. "History of Television in India". p. 30

[33] McDowell. "Globalization and Policy Choice". p. 164

[34] 2000. Annual Report 1999-2000, Ministry of I & B. New Delhi: Government of India. p. 20 and Doordarshan at a Glance. http://www.ddindia.com/dd_about.html. Accessed on Monday, April 05, 2004 at 14 hrs

[35] For a general introduction to the media-development debate, see Srinivas R. Melkote. 1991. *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice*. New Delhi: Sage, Sham P. Thomas. 1996. The Use of Various Media for Development with Special Reference to the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad. M. Th. Thesis, Senate of Serampore.

[36] Chatterji. *Broadcasting in India*. p. 51

the programmes were mostly science-based subjects in a class-room format intended to supplement class-room education. This focus then extended to social and farm education, with programmes on farming methods, notes on hygiene, methods of family planning and similar instructional fare.[37] A weekly 20-minute agricultural programme introduced in January 1967 for farmers in Delhi called '*Krishi Darshan,*' still continues on all *Doordarshan Kendras*. When the experimental broadcast was perceived to be a success, the duration of the programme was increased to a ninety-minute slot and entertainment programmes like music and dance were added. According to Mitra, "better broadcasting technology, proliferation of transmission centers (sic) and the lengthening duration of programmes created the scope for a variety of programmes."[38] With the increase in the duration of broadcast, entertainment programmes began to include feature films and film-based music. Films and film-based programmes including[39] *Chitrahaar, Chitramala* and *Cinemala* (all three mean 'a garland of film') have since then been a major component of both *Doordarshan* and cable channels. By the mid-1970s there were both educational and entertainment programmes on television.

SITE proved to be significant in combining development communication with entertainment. During this project, the programme duration was increased to four hours with two daily transmissions. The morning telecast targeted the school children whereas the evening telecast was mainly for adults. While the former was broadly educational in nature, the latter was mostly entertainment with instructional messages on themes like national integration.[40] It was also during this time that commercials were introduced on *Doordarshan* which in the long run have further contributed to the diversification of entertainment programmes,[41] including sports and sponsored serials.

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[37] Mitra. *Television and Popular Culture in India*. p. 12

[38] Mitra. *Television and Popular Culture in India*. p. 30

[39] Some of the other film-song programmes are: *Chaaya Geet*, *Rangoli* (on *Doordarshan*); *Cibaca Geet Mala*, *Luxhit Parade*, *Super Hit Muqabala* (Metro Channel); *Philips Top Ten*, *Gaane Anjane*, *McDowells' Farmaish* (Zee TV); *BPL Oye* (V Channel); *Videocon Top Parade*, *Colgate Top Takkar* (Jain TV); *Rin Priya Raagalu* (Eenadu TV) *Sarigama* and *Your Choice* (Asianet)

[40] For programme details, see Mody. "Lessons from the Indian Satellite Experiment".

[41] Shields. "Putting Media Policy in its Place". p. 92

1.3.2 Sports to soaps

As mentioned earlier, it was with ASIAD in 1982 that live coverage of sports was introduced on television. Within a short time coverage began of major sports and games like the World Cup football, Olympic Games and perhaps most importantly cricket matches. In addition, by 1984–85, at least for the audiences in the Metropolitan cities, there was a variety of programmes courtesy of the total dedication of Metro channel exclusively to entertainment programmes.

It was however the latter part of 1980s that proved to be both unprecedented and controversial for *Doordarshan* programmes. Even though there was already a shift from the science oriented, social education programmes to serials, *Hum Log* (Us Folks) the first long-running pro-development opera telecast in 1986–87 and the other Hindi serials that followed it, such as *Buniyaad* (Foundation) and *Nukkad* (Street Corner), proved to be significant in popularising serials to a significantly large audience in the metropolitan centres.[42] Since then soaps have become a major component of television programmes but it was the sacred soaps that brought the nation to television.[43]

1.3.3 Sacred soaps: *Ramayan* and *Mahabaharat* serials

The most popular programme ever shown on Indian television was *Ramayan*; a serial based on the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. The television adaptation of this great cultural and religious epic of India was produced and directed by a well-known Bollywood filmmaker, Ramanand Sagar. This mythological epic, which *Doordarshan* began telecasting on January 25, 1987, was initially planned for fifty-two episodes of forty-five minutes each. However, the public demand for this religious soap, which came on air on Sunday mornings at 9a.m., was such that it eventually had seventy-eight episodes concluding on July 31, 1988.[44]

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[42] Rajagopal suggests that these serials were inspired by a similar experiment in Latin America and gives a brief description of each of them. Rajagopal. "The Rise of National Programming". pp. 103–105

[43] Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe. 1990. *Affirmation and Denial: Construction of Feminity on Indian Television*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 113

[44] For details of the story, production and reception of this serial, see Philip Lutgendorf. 1995. "All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context". In *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. The government justified the extensions of the serial on popular demand but was accused of political motivation. See, Madhu Jain. 1988. "Ramayan: The Second Coming". *India Today*, August 16-31. p. 81. The government was also accused of interfering in the editorial decisions on its sequel,

The *Ramayan* serial proved to be extraordinary on many counts. I shall, however, discuss only three of them, which are important for the purpose of this study. Firstly, the *Ramayan* serial made television viewing a national phenomenon. Sunday mornings became television time for many people both in the urban and village settings.[45] This serial broke all previous records for Indian television in its reach, revenue and viewership across the country irrespective of region, religion, gender and generation.[46]

As I experienced in Mumbai,[47] people vanished in many parts of India from roads and local trains during the telecast of *Ramayan*, as if under curfew. Many shopkeepers closed their shops to watch the serial, whereas some other shops which had television sets became viewing centres for the many who did not have a set at home. It is also reported that cross-country buses stopped "at eating houses with TV sets so that both driver and the passengers could view the week's episode."[48] Saroj Malik, who conducted research in two north Indian villages in March 1988, reports the intensity with which villagers watched *Ramayan*. One of her interviewees dramatised it by saying: "a murderer would go out of the village after committing the crime, without being noticed by a single soul during the telecast of Ramayana."[49]

Even though there were no official statistics, some estimates of audience ratings of 92 per cent were recorded and 90 million people in India, that is one tenth of the entire population of the day, tuned in every-week to watch this serial.[50] This was unprecedented in the history of television viewing in India.

Secondly, the *Ramayan* serial signalled the advent of religious programmes on television and consequently the questions concerning the relationship between

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Mahabharat. See, M. Rahman. 1988. "Mahabharat: A Political Statement". *India Today*, October 16-31.

[45] Kirk Johnson. 2000. *Television and Social Change in Rural India*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 187. The exception to this Sunday morning viewing will be discussed in Chapter Five.

[46] It was even popular in a Muslim country like Pakistan. Ramindar Singh. 1988. "A Dramatic Sweep: Pakistan TV-Serials Invade Indian Homes". *India Today*, May 1-15. p. 84

[47] See Introduction (i)

[48] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 7. See also, Salil Tripathi. 1988. "Ramayana: Epic Spin-offs". *India Today*, July 1-15. p. 72

[49] Saroj Malik. 1989. "Television and Rural India". *Media, Culture and Society* 4, no. 11. p. 475

[50] Neil Simpson. 1993. "Popular Religion on TV". In *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Chris Arthur. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. p. 107

television and religion. Television, until that time, was an instructional or entertainment medium with science, secular and film programmes. Through the *Ramayan* serial, television became a new site for spiritual experience and devotional practices for the first time in India. For a religion like Hinduism, which, unlike Christianity and Islam, does not have a scripture or founder, the screened *Ramayan* was claimed to have been like "scriptures on celluloid"[51] and its reception became a collective religious experience at a national level. In this sense, television provided, as Pradip Thomas rightly observes, the mass mediated experience leading to a consensus on religious nationalism.[52]

Religion gave television a special place among the devotional practices in the domestic context and viewing of *Ramayan* quickly assumed the status of a religious activity. Lavina Melwani reports:

> In many homes the watching of *Ramayan* has become a religious ritual, and the television set...is garlanded, decorated with sandalwood paste and vermillion, and conch shells are blown. Grandparents admonish youngsters to bathe before the show and housewives put off serving meals so that the family is purified and fasting before *Ramayan*.[53]

In many houses and viewing places this serial even acquired a sense of community worship, otherwise not a common practice among Hindus. During the telecast of *Ramayana* and other religious serials television has even become an object of worship. Many Hindus assembled before the set prayerfully, made cheers of *Ramachandra ki jai* (Hail Ram) both before and after the serial and burned incense before the screen. Some of them prostrated themselves at the sight of gods (*darshan* or sacred seeing) on the screen. At the end of the serial it was a practice in many such places to distribute sweets (*prasada*) as at the end of a formal worship in temple or house. In other words, for millions of Indians *Ramayan* was not just a serial but an opportunity to integrate epics into their routine domestic context and everyday life. Of course, this religious aura of television and development of devotional activities around the television set on Sundays were confined to some of the Hindus. As we

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[51] A claim made by its producer Ramanand Sagar. See, Jain. "Ramayan". p. 81

[52] Pradip N. Thomas. 2001. *Communicating Difference: The Making and Unmaking of Common Values in India*. London: WACC. p. 45

[53] Lavina Melwani. 1988. "Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan Serial Re-Ignites Epic's values". *India Worldwide*, February. p. 56-57 cited Lutgendorf. "All in the (Raghu) Family". p. 224

shall see in Chapter Seven, Marthomites and Muslims responded to *Ramayan* in a totally different way.

Thirdly, the success of *Ramayan* which "recreated Hindu culture for television"[54] led to similar sacred soaps becoming a prominent part of television programming. *Ramayan* was immediately followed by another epic serial, *Mahabharat*. This 93-episode serial premiered on *Doordarshan* during 1988–1991, was directed by another famous Indian Movie producer Ramesh Sippy and was sponsored by an Indian business corporation. *Mahabharat* was also telecast on Sunday mornings, to occupy the slot vacated by the *Ramayan* serial, and proved to be equally or more popular than the former in its reach and devotional viewing.[55]

Since then there has been no paucity of Hindu religious serials on *Doordarshan*. The popularity of the sacred soaps has prompted cable channels to follow suit and even after a decade, repeats of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* were telecast on Sony TV and Zee TV respectively.[56] There were nearly a dozen Hindu religious soaps on television at one time in 1997. In addition to serials like *Jai Hanuman*, *Om Namashivay* and *Sri Krishna*, which are broadcast on national television with subtitles in regional languages, there are also regional level religious soaps like *Sri Ayyappan* on the Kerala regional network.[57]

While these Hindu religious serials have undoubtedly been a catalyst in popularising television viewing in India they have also been controversial and continue to generate much debate. The broadcast of these religious serials on the public service network has been accused of being a betrayal of the secularism of the Indian State.[58] It has been argued that these serials are privileging a north Indian Hindi Hindu identity as the national identity.[59] It was also suspected to be part of an attempt to

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[54] Elizabeth Burch. 2002. "Media Literacy, Cultural Proximity and TV Aesthetics: Why Indian Soap Operas Work in Nepal and the Hindu Diaspora". *Media, Culture and Society* 24, no. 4. p. 576

[55]For a detailed study of this serial see, Mitra. *Television and Popular Culture in India,* Ananda Mitra. 1994. "An Indian Religious Soap Opera and the Hindu Image". *Media, Culture and Society* 16, no. 1. p. 150.

[56] Daya Kishan Thussu. 2000. *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. London: Arnold. p. 204

[57] While the first three are based on epic characters like Hanuman (monkey God who helped Ram), God Shiv and God Krishna, the latter is a Kerala deity from the folk tradition.

[58] Krishnan and Dighe. *Affirmation and Denial*. p. 123, Chatterji. *Broadcasting in India*. p. 12

[59]Mitra. *Television and Popular Culture in India,* Mitra. "An Indian Religious Soap Opera and the Hindu Image". p. 153.

establish Brahminic hegemony over India and to whip up Hindu communalism.[60] In fact one of the questions of this present study itself concerns the response of a minority community like Christians to such mythologicals.

The debate still rages on whether the broadcast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* in the late 1980s fuelled a revival of Hindu fundamentalism and the demolition of *Babri Masjid* at Ayodhya.[61] Claiming that the mosque stood at the birthplace of *Ram*, a Hindu god and the central character of *Ramayan*, Hindu fanatics razed it to the ground in 1992. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right wing Hindu political party, supported this demolition and used footage from the *Ramayan* serial as part of their election campaign in the parliament election in 1991. Since then, BJP has also been fielding some of the main characters of the *Ramayan* serial as their candidates in the general elections. Surprisingly, 'god' '*Ram*,' was defeated, but his wife *Sita* and the anti-hero *Ravan* won their electoral battles and made it into the parliament.[62]

The debate on the role of *Doordarshan* in contributing to the rise of majority communalism was also fuelled by the paucity of programmes it telecast on other religions. Apart from a serial on Jesus and some episodes of the Bible telecast on the national channel on Saturday mornings, there was not much for Christian audiences.[63] As I shall show in Chapter Seven, there is anger and frustration with *Doordarshan* among the Marthomites and Muslims for this apparent neglect. However, people of different religions had watched the epic serials though with different levels of commitment that I discuss in Chapter Seven. It is, however,

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[60] For some of the critique and debate, see Lutgendorf. "All in the (Raghu) Family". On the other hand, in the Hindu heartland of India, electronic Ramayan was eulogised as to have awakened Hinduism. See Madhu Jain. 1988. "Ramanand Sagar: Heavenly Harvest". *India Today*, September 1-15.

[61] For a detailed discussion on the relation between television, consumption and Hindu nationalism, see Arvind Rajagopal. 2001. *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also, Usha Zacharias. 2003. "The Smile of Mona Lisa: Postcolonial Desires, Nationalist Families, and the Birth of Consumer Television". *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 20, no. 4. p. 390

[62] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 36. The identification of characters who act as Gods on stage, small or big screen, with Gods themselves is a prevalent attitude in many parts of India and among the Hindu community. Portrayal of Gods on the celluloid screen has contributed to the electoral victory of film-stars turned politicians; N. T. Rama Rao and M. G. Ramachandran among others. With regard to *Ramayan*, lead characters like Arun Govil and Deepika Chikhalia were adored in public places. Instances of one of the god-characters seen smoking in a public place and a 'goddess' appearing in public attired in western clothes caused dismay and disappointment to many.

[63] Christians had to wait until the arrival of cable channels such as God channel, Raj TV and Jeevan TV to have Christian programmes.

beyond debate that the epic serials played a great role in making television viewing a national phenomenon and in the diversification of its programmes.

1.3.4 Hindi to regional languages

Even though programmes were being diversified through the decades, the broadcast hours were still limited as long as *Doordarshan* had a monopoly over television broadcasts. For instance, even in the late 1980s broadcasting was for only eleven hours a day.[64] Moreover, the programmes were mostly in Hindi since there was limited scope for regional language programmes under the regional network of *Doordarshan*. Keval Kumar highlights this imbalance when he says, "as much as 47% of telecast time on the national network is devoted to Hindi language programs, (sic) with the result that other Indian languages are side-lined on the national network broadcast from New Delhi."[65] Consequently, despite the variety in programmes there was not much for non-Hindi speakers until the arrival of cable television.[66]

Cable television marked the beaming of programmes in the vernacular for a substantial duration of time. For instance, in the place of a few hours of Regional Network programme of *Doordarshan*, Kerala has witnessed the introduction of three cable channels within the last decade featuring round-the-clock Malayalam programmes.[67] As a result *Doordarshan* began DD4 and other regional language channels. In addition the 1990s witnessed the launch of dedicated channels for sports, news, films and education.

The result of all these innovations and proliferations, after a decade of cable television, is a multiplication of choices available to the audiences, from Western entertainment imports to Indian produced programmes and from science to sacred soaps. With genres ranging from news, serials, game shows, sports and films to music, and target-oriented programmes for children, women and farmers, there is a

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[64] Zacharias. "The Smile of Mona Lisa". p. 389

[65] Kumar. "History of Television in India". pp. 31–32

[66] For the challenge and the effect of Cable television on *Doordarshan*, see Usha Vyasulu Reddi. 1996. "Rip Van Winkle: A Story of Indian Television". In *Contemporary Television*, ed. French and Richards, Ewart C. Skinner and Krishna P. Kandath. 1998."International Satellite Broadcasting in India and Other Areas: A Critical Summary". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote et.al. pp. 307–308, Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan. 2003. "Look for the Real Culprit: In Defence of Television". In *Globalisation, Mass Media and Indian Cultural Values*, ed. Traber. p. 132

[67] I shall give a brief history of the Malayalam cable channels in Chapter Four.

wide variety of programmes and linguistic choices today.[68] As one set of statistics shows, the programme output of *Doordarshan* alone is 1485 hours per week.[69] Twenty-four hour broadcasting of news, sports, business, music, movies and cartoons is no longer the exception.[70] Gone are the days when television woke up for just twenty minutes!

The discussion so far suggests that television viewing in India has grown by leaps and bounds during the last two decades. As a result of the increase in the number of channels coupled with the tremendous increase in the duration and diversification of programmes, television viewing has become possible as a day and night activity in most parts of India. What has made it a domestic practice is a simultaneous shift in the viewing context.

1.4 Context of viewing

The increase in the television channels and programmes has coincided with or even resulted in a change in the viewing context of television. As I discuss in this section, television viewing began as a community practice in India. Domestic television viewing is of recent origin, developing in the last two decades.

1.4.1 Community viewing

When television transmission began there were hardly any privately-owned television sets in the country, hence community television sets had to be set up at 21 locations in Delhi.[71] To facilitate community viewing, teleclubs were also organised

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[68] Or even to *Manglish*, the mix of English and Malayalam. The satellite channels are blamed for having challenged the linguistic orthodoxies in India. Some suggest that the channels have created a new lingua franca while some others fault them for having distorted the pronunciation and phonetical aspects of languages. For example, Zee TV has been known to have pioneered a new language called Hinglish mixing English and Hindi as has been done by the educated urban audiences in their daily use. This has at times even been called 'Zinglish'. See Page and Crawley. *Satellites over South Asia*. p. 156. See also, *Samskaravum Bhasha Uccharanavum Channalukar Maattimarikkunnu* (Channels distort pronunciation and culture). http://malayalamanorama.com/01dec03/keralam.htm#3. Monday, December 03, 2001. Accessed 10 hrs

[69] Viewers and Viewership. http://www.ddindia.net/RealContent/about/index.html. Accessed on Tuesday, April 06, 2004 at 16 hrs

[70] K. Viswanath and Kavita Karan. 2000. "INDIA". In *Handbook of Media in Asia*, ed. Shelton A. Gunaratne. New Delhi: Sage. p. 101

[71] Viewers and Viewership.

in many areas in and around the capital to provide the space for viewing and a venue to discuss the television programmes.[72]

In October 1961, Ford Foundation helped to fund the first formal educational telecast by All India Radio. As part of this project television sets were given to 250 schools around Delhi. On the apparent success of this project, UNESCO gave $20,000 for the purchase of community receivers. Again, when *Krishi Darshan* started in 1967, the project began with the installation of community television sets in eighty villages around Delhi.

Television viewing was never thought of as a domestic activity in those early years. There was no television related industry or production of television receivers in the country, so it is hardly surprising that there were only 41 television licensees in 1962, after three years of television broadcasting. This scenario changed with the gradual expansion of television reach to various cities. Privately owned black and white sets began to appear in Delhi by 1970 and with the strengthening and expansion of the *Doordarshan* network, reception began to spread to other cities as well. Still, domestic television viewing was exceptional since the government continued to sponsor both the transmitters and the receivers, especially for SITE and its follow-up programmes.

SITE, in part, was designed to be a planning ground for community television. One of the agreements, under the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Atomic Energy of the government of India and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the co-sponsor of SITE, was to "enhance capability in the design, manufacture, deployment, installation, operation, movement and maintenance of village television receivers."[73] Accordingly, Direct Receiver sets (television connected to chicken mesh antennae) were set up and maintained at government cost in all the 2400 villages of this experiment. The SITE pilot survey team identified in each village a person, usually a teacher in the school at which the set was placed, who was then appointed by the government as a paid television custodian to operate and maintain the set.

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[72] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 19

[73] Chander and Karnik. *Planning for Satellite Broadcasting*. p. 51

Kheda Communication Project (KCP), the follow-up of SITE, was also an attempt in community-based television.[74] Six hundred and fifty television sets were provided to 400 villages in the Kheda district of the state of Gujarat for this educational broadcast. These sets, again, were installed mostly in public places such as schools to facilitate community viewing.[75]

While such efforts maintained television viewing as a community activity until the end of the 1970s, community viewing began to decline during the following years. This was partly due to the problems associated with community viewing itself. It would have been a miracle if a small 20 or 24 inch screen could cater to a village of two thousand or more people. Community television also suffered from operational problems. For instance, there was the endemic problem of irregular and erratic power supply[76] in many parts of the states, dampening the interest of the viewers.[77] Even where people put up with this irritant there was no system in place to monitor the custodian or to repair and replace the sets. So in many places the custodian regulated the viewing as he wished. In some other places, where the set was kept in the house of the village headmen, there were problems of accessibility because of caste distinction and discrimination. There were also class and gender problems. Bella Mody finds that, during SITE, the large farmers did not "relish sitting beside their 'daily labour,' evening after evening."[78] Gender wise community viewing was a male dominated activity since it was mostly adult men and children who constituted the gathering. During SITE, it was observed that "audience was composed of about 30 per cent children, 50 per cent adult males and 20 per cent adult females."[79] Moreover, as Nilanjana Gupta observes, "because of the circumstances of community viewing, women, especially in the age group of fifteen to twenty four,

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[74] For details of the Kheda project and its evaluation, see, D. Kalwachwala and H. Joshi. 1990. *Nari tu Narayani: A Retrospective Look*. Ahmedabad: Development and Education Communication Unit, Space Application Center.

[75] Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers. 2001. *India's Communication Revolution: From Bullock Carts to Cyber Marts*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 95

[76] Malik. "Television and Rural India". p. 461

[77] See Rao. "The New Doordarshan".

[78] Mody. "Lessons from the Indian Satellite Experiment". p. 119

[79] Mody. "Lessons from the Indian Satellite Experiment". p. 119

were discouraged from watching."[80] In other words, community television was not favourably disposed to women or conducive to family viewing.

As a result of these problems of operation, space, social differences and others like the clashing of egos, the well-to-do families began to purchase their own sets[81] and watch in their homes, signalling a paradigmatic shift in the context of television viewing.

Apart from the problems of community viewing, the increase in the duration of television programmes itself would have prompted many families to have a television set at home to avoid frequenting the community set. While the live coverage of ASIAD and other sporting events fuelled the urge to acquire television sets,[82] this desire became all-consuming with the telecast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*.[83] What greatly accentuated this shift to domestic television viewing, however, was a change in the government policy in the post SITE years. From the early 1980s the government began to promote wide-scale production and marketing of television receivers on the one hand and withheld support to community television on the other.

1.4.2 Domestic viewing

While community viewing was besieged with problems, domestic viewing was becoming affordable and attractive. The post-SITE years witnessed an increased production of television receivers in India.[84] The indigenous manufacturers with the aid of liberalisation of licensing regulations initiated an unprecedented manufacture of television sets. The first Indian television factory, opened in 1969 in Kanpur, manufactured only 1250 sets in its first year. But within less than a decade, that is by 1977, there were forty manufacturers producing almost a quarter of a million sets annually.[85] By the early 1980s, India prided herself on being self sufficient in the

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[80] Gupta. *Switching Channels*. p. 23

[81] Malik. "Television and Rural India". p. 481

[82] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 49

[83] Unnikrishnan and Bajpai. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. p. 42

[84] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 2

[85] Prem Kumar. 1988. *The Television Industry in India: Market Structure, Conduct, and Performance*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publishers. p. 42

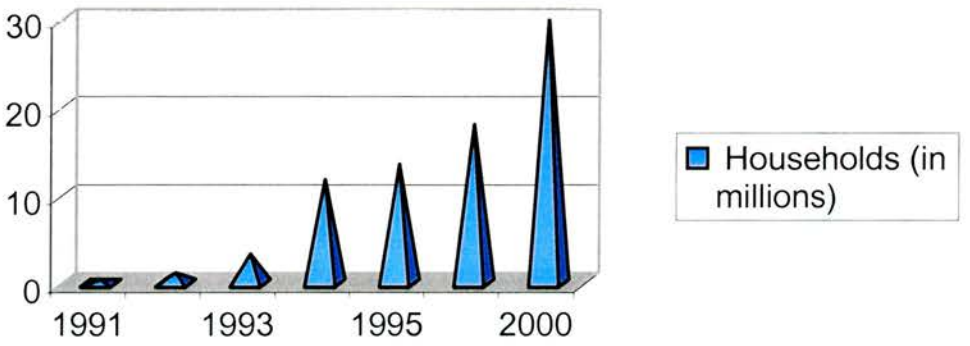
production of receiver sets[86] and by 1986, the annual production was over three million sets, including 700,000 colour sets. Geetika Pathania comments:

> The tax concessions to business, import liberalisation in priority sectors, and the relaxing of licensing regulations in the 1985 central budget...had created a boom for consumer electronics. Production of television receivers registered an impressive 44 percent growth during the period between 1980 and 1988, mainly due to the boom in the kit assembly brought on by the introduction of colour television.[87]

The policy of permitting the import of colour television found immediate impact in states like Kerala where thousands of its migrant workers in the Gulf region started bringing television sets home for their families.[88] The domestic television market also devised various schemes to maximise the sale of indigenous sets.[89]

While all these factors have contributed to the shift towards domestic viewing, it was the advent of cable television that necessitated domestic viewing. This was primarily because cable television is subscription based and there was no provision for the viewers of community sets to avail themselves of it. Moreover, as it has been mentioned, the arrival of cable television promoted round-the-clock programmes changing the very nature of viewing. Since then, television viewing has ceased to be a matter of going to a nearby park or school for an occasional telecast or two. Within a decade of its introduction in 1991, as shown in diagram (1.1), there were 30 million cable homes in India.[90]

1.1 Cable households in India



[86] John A. Lent. 1998. "Foreword". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote et.al. p. viii

[87] Pathania. "Responses to Transnational Television in a STAR-struck land". p. 74

[88] Vilanilam. "The Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indian Television". p. 62

[89] I will describe such efforts in Chapter Four.

It was of course the urban and the well-to-do audiences who were in the forefront in buying television sets and/or subscribing to cable television. Unnikrishnan and Bajpai conducted research project in Delhi during 1992–93 and found that 95% of the 730 children they interviewed had television sets at home.[91] Within a decade of the above research, there are more television owners and viewers in the rural areas than in urban areas. Even those who do not own a set go to their neighbours to watch television, which has become part of enjoying and offering hospitality.[92]

Television is no more considered to be a luxury of the urban middle and upper class people. On the contrary, it has come to be regarded as one of the essential household commodities.[93] In many states, like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, it has become part of the dowry that a bridegroom is given in marriage.[94] Even in states like Kerala, where the dowry is usually given in cash rather than in kind, there are instances of giving a television set as a wedding present.[95]

A license was required to possess a television for nearly a quarter of a century. When this system was abolished in 1984, there were only 3.6 million licensed TV sets in India. Even though accurate figures about the number of television sets have not been available since then, according to some estimates[96] *Doordarshan* (as of June 2002) reaches about 80 million households in the country.[97]

As a result of the various processes and developments that I discussed above, television viewing is increasingly becoming a domestic activity as more and more

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[90] Kumar. "History of Television in India". p. 30

[91] Unnikrishnan and Bajpai. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. p. 42

[92] B. S. Baviskar. 2000. "Foreword". *Television and Social Change in Rural India*. Johnson. p. 12. For him, "such activities often lead to the creation of new relationships or the strengthening of existing ones". p. 12. I shall, however, discuss in Chapter Four people buying a television set in order to maintain the existing relationships between neighbours.

[93] Unnikrishnan and Bajpai. *Impact of Television Advertising on Children*. p. 42

[94] Johnson. *Television and Social Change in Rural India*. p. 164

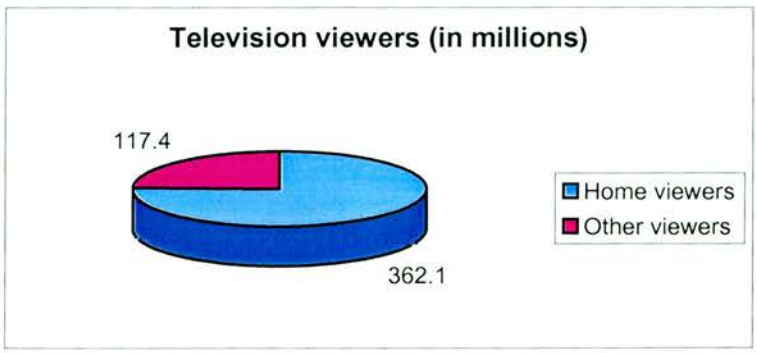
[95] One of my interviewees in Thiruvananthapuram received her television set as a wedding present from her grandmother.

[96] National Readership Survey sponsored by the newspaper industry provides some information about television ownership and viewership. The National Council of Applied Economic Research and the Consumer Electronic and Television Manufacturers Association also provide statistics about television sets over the years.

[97] Viewership. http://www.ddindia.net/RealContent/about/view.html. Accessed on Friday, December 06, 2002 at 10 hrs

Indians watch television at home. The following diagram (1.2) shows, that home viewers constitute two thirds of the television viewers in India.

1.2 Home viewers vs. other viewers in India (as of June 2002)[98]



If the television audiences in the earlier 1960s in India were rural farmers or school children accessing television in a park, school or community hall, the audiences of twenty-first century television are families who watch television in their domestic context.

1.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of television in the domestic context and this chapter has provided the historical background by recounting the emergence of television viewing as a domestic activity in India.

I have suggested in this chapter that television viewing in India has passed many milestones like SITE, ASIAD and the advent of cable television in its journey to becoming a national and everyday domestic practice for a large section of its population. A retrospective look reveals that this growth was gradual and painfully slow in the early years, gathering momentum dramatically in the last two decades.

Over the last forty-five years television viewers have witnessed paradigmatic shifts in conduits, contents and contexts. From a single government owned terrestrial channel the hundred- fold increase in the number of channels (including public service and commercial television) and the resultant reach of television signals to

[98] Constructed from Viewership. http://www.ddindia.net/RealContent/about/view.html. Accessed on Friday, December 06, 2002 at 10 hrs

almost every nook and cranny of India is mind-boggling. The same is the case with the contents and duration of programmes. From a bi-weekly twenty-minute telecast the duration has increased to round-the-clock, and the programmes have diversified from science to sacred soaps and from English or Hindi to regional languages. In this process, television has also assumed various roles from social educator to an object of worship. Along with these developments, there has been a shift from community to domestic television viewing. Now an overwhelming majority of Indian television viewers are home viewers.

In this chapter I have argued that television viewing has become a possible everyday domestic practice for sizeable sections of people in India. How is it being incorporated into their domestic life? Does television viewing influence or is it influenced by the everyday religious, cultural and media practices of the people? It is these important questions that I deal with by focusing on a few families of Marthoma Christians in Kerala.

Chapter Two
An Overview of Marthoma Christians in Kerala

2.1 Introduction

The question of how Marthoma Christians perceive and use television in their everyday life is the major focus of this research. In order to address this question in Part II, I introduce briefly in this chapter the Marthomites in their religious, cultural and media context. I suggest that ecclesiastically Marthomites are a reformed group which is entirely distrustful of any images in church. They accommodate and adapt to various religious and cultural practices from their everyday lives, but they firmly resist attempts to make alterations in their religion, culture and media practice.

I shall proceed in three sections in this chapter. In the first section I attempt a brief history of the emergence of Marthomites as a separate ecclesial group from among the Malankara Christians.[1] I argue that the reformation in the Malankara Church which paved the way for the formation of the Marthoma Church was partly a communication revolution[2] and was also a movement to expunge images from churches. I use the word "revolution" loosely. In the last 50 years any major social change has been called a revolution, e.g. the sexual revolution, the information revolution and the digital revolution. Sudden socio-political changes always have a communication dimension. As reality changes, language is changed; and changed language changes the perception of reality. Whether or not the changes in church communication that were brought about by the founders of the Marthoma Church amount to a revolution is debateable. The magnitude of the change brought about in the language of worship needs to be seen against the background of Syrian

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[1]The majority of Christians in Kerala are called Malankara Christians because of the tradition that they are descendents of the first congregation St. Thomas formed in a place called Mallyankara. They are known by various names; St. Thomas Christians, *Nazrani Mapilas*, Syrian Christians. These and other names are derived from their associations with important people, places, practices and privileges. For details, see Z. M. Parett. 1965. *Malankara Nazranikal* (Malankara Nazarenes). Kottayam: Manorama Publishing House. pp. 28–31. For some other names, see W. J. Richards. 1908. *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: A Sanctuary in the Midst of the Heathen*. London: Bemrose and Sons Limited. p. 2, Mathew Daniel. 1985. *Kerala Christhava Samskaram* (Kerala Christian Culture). Thiruvalla: Christian Literature Society. p. 33.

[2] In suggesting reformation as a communication revolution I follow to some extend Traber's argument that "all genuine revolutions are fundamentally communication revolutions." Michael Traber. 1993. "Changes of Communication-Needs and Rights in Social Revolution". In *Communication and Democracy*, ed. Slavko Splichal and Janet Wasko. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. p. 30

Christians, who, for more than a millennium, worshiped in a language which the vast majority of the laity could neither read nor understand.

In the second section I analyse some of the religious and cultural practices of Marthomites. In this section I demonstrate that Marthomites have not been subservient to one particular culture but rather have negotiated with various cultures in forming a pattern of accommodation and adaptation. I suggest in this regard various influences from Syrian, Hindu and Western cultures in their worship, rituals and customs. In the last section I analyse the media practice of the Marthomites in their pre-television days. I show that despite sharing many features of the local culture/s the Marthomites have excluded the traditional media and performing arts (e.g. the dance, song, and festivals of Hindus and others) on the one hand and embraced oral and print media (largely brought by CMS missionaries) on the other. I shall discuss the use of modern mass media, that is, newspaper, radio and films in Chapter Four.

Placement of the Marthomites in their religious, cultural and media context will act as a marker in discussing, in Part II, the significance of their acceptance of television and the consequent interactions between television, religion and culture in their home sphere. I will argue in Part II that Marthomites have accepted television despite their religious apprehension of images. Their acceptance of television thus constitutes a shift in their media practice with possible implications for their religious practices. I will also suggest that they accept television (as with many of their religious and cultural practices) with a pattern of accommodation and adaptation.

But before getting into any of these discussions, let me first give a brief overview of the state of Kerala to place the Marthomites in their wider context.[3]

2.1.1 Kerala: "God's own country"!

Kerala is the southern-most state in the Indian union. It was reorganised on a linguistic basis nearly a decade after India became independent from British colonial rule and was inaugurated on November 1, 1956. Kerala comprises all the Malayalam speaking regions including major parts of the erstwhile Travancore, Cochin states

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[3] I do not attempt a socio-political and economic history of Kerala or that of the Marthomites. I also do not discuss other religious groups such as Hindus and Muslims. For a good introduction to Kerala, see A. Sreedhara Menon. 1979. *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, K. P. Padmanabha Menon. 1924. *History of Kerala*. Cochin: Cochin Government Press.

and Malabar.[4] It has a land area of 38, 833 square kilometres and a population of 31 million was recorded in the 2001 census.[5]

Kerala has many distinctive features when compared with other states in India. For instance, it is the most literate state in the country. Even though the total literacy achieved in 1991 has declined in the last decade, 94.24% of the male and 87.72% of the female population are literate. Again, unlike many other parts of India, women outnumber men and are almost equally educated.

Politically, Kerala became the first state in the world to vote a Communist Government into power—in 1957. The Marxist-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) has since then been in power alternately (with a few exceptions) with the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF). The Communist party and its governments were mainly responsible for organising the unorganised labour sector and initiating land reforms reducing radically the number of landless, poorly paid and exploited people in the state.

Another distinguishing feature of Kerala is the presence of Christians from the dawn of Christianity.[6] Unlike the three percent at the national level, Christians constitute twenty-one percent of the Kerala population and form the third biggest religious community after Hindus and Muslims. Perhaps because of the sizeable presence of all major religious communities, Kerala is known for religious harmony and peaceful living.

Kerala, which the tourist promotional brochures tend to describe as, "God's own country"[7] by virtue of the picturesque and evergreen landscape draped with rivers, lakes and backwaters, however, has its share of problems. Despite exporting millions of skilled and unskilled migrant labourers to other parts of India and abroad Kerala still has the highest percentage of educated yet unemployed people in India.[8] Even

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[4] Menon. *History of Kerala*. p. 1, pp. 28–29

[5] Govt. of Kerala. Kerala at a Glance. http://www.kerala.gov.in/ataglance/ataglance.htm. Accessed on Friday, December 03, 2004 at 18 hrs

[6] "If not the whole, the bulk of the earliest Christians of India were converts in Kerala." Mathias A. Mundadan. 1984. *History of Christianity in India: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*. Bangalore: Church History Association of India. p. 114

[7] See for instance, Kerala-Specials.com. http://www.gods-own-country.info/, Kerala-God's Own Country. http://vsbabu.org/personal/kerala.html. Accessed on Friday, December 10, 2004 at 15 hrs

[8] Five percent (1.7 million) of the total Kerala population are migrant workers abroad, some of whom as I have discussed in the previous chapter (1.4.2), contributed to the spread of television in Kerala.

though this state can boast of its development in educational, health and social sectors, the perils of the class and caste systems still prevail among all religious communities.

2.2 Reformation and the emergence of the Marthoma Christians in Kerala

Malankara Christians in Kerala believe that they have a history older than that of many of their counterparts in the world. During the course of history, however, they were divided into various denominations e.g. the Roman Catholic (Malankara Rite), Orthodox/Jacobite and Marthoma Church. Irrespective of the denominational differences they share much in common in their tradition, culture and media. In this section, I discuss briefly the formation of the Marthoma Church from among the Malankara Christians highlighting their resistance to images and affirmation of the vernacular language.

2.2.1 Saint Thomas tradition

Marthomites share with other Malankara Christians a living tradition of the apostolate of Saint Thomas in Kerala.[9] According to this tradition the Apostle Thomas was the pioneering Christian communicator in India forming the St. Thomas Christian community. It is believed that this community entered into a relationship with the East Syrian Persian Church from the third or fourth century. This relationship is attested to by the introduction of a Syriac liturgy and culture among

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[9] This is a contentious issue among scholars and they are divided into different groups. One group denies the possibility of an apostolic origin altogether. See, James Hough. 1839. *History of Christianity in India: From the Commencement of the Christian Era*. London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, George Milne Rae. 1892. *Syrian Church in India*. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood. Another group is sympathetic to the tradition but hesitates from affirming it fully. This includes Leslie W. Brown. 1956. *Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*. Cambridge: University Press, C. B. Firth. 1961. *An Introduction to Indian Church*. Madras: CLS.

Among those who argue that there is sufficient evidence to validate the tradition there is a further division. One group suggests both a north Indian and south Indian apostolate. For example, J. N. Farquhar. 1926. "The Apostle Thomas in North India". *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library,* J. N. Farquhar. 1927. "The Apostle Thomas in South India". *Bulletin of John Ryland's Library,* A. E. Medlycott. 1905. *India and the Apostle Thomas*. London: (no publisher). Those who consider the South Indian tradition more reliable are mainly scholars from the region including C. P. Mathew and M. M. Thomas. 1967. *The Indian Churches of Saint Thomas*. Delhi: ISPCK, Mundadan. *History of Christianity in India,* Placid J. Podipara. 1970. *The Thomas Christians*. London: Darton. Irrespective of the scholarly disputes, the tradition is entrenched among the Malankara Christians as evidenced in the various family history documents called- *Kudumbacharithram* and in traditional songs.

Malankara Christians, which continued without breach until the Portuguese-Latin jurisdiction in the sixteenth century.

2.2.2 Latin domination and resistance

Portuguese interests in Kerala began with Vasco de Gamma's famous voyage to India in May 1498 AD. The Portuguese, who pursued ecclesiastical interests alongside their political and commercial enterprises, started working among the Malankara Christians eventually effecting the Portuguese "ritual colonisation of the Malabar."[10]

One of the decisions of the Synod of Diamper[11] in 1599 AD which established the Roman Catholic domination over Malankara Christians was that images and icons should be introduced into the churches. The Portuguese were surprised to see the bare interior of churches and one of the letters to the Portuguese king written during 1516–18 reveals the Malankara Christian practice in this regard. "They have crosses in their churches on the altars as well as engravings but no images or engraved outlines of profiles and faces," the letter reads.[12] The Portuguese realised that the reason for this was a belief that St. Thomas had forbidden the use of statues. The Synod of Diamper deplored the mean look of the interior of the Syrian Churches and stressed the need for beautifying the churches with images and paintings.

The relationship between the Latin and Malankara Christians was turbulent from the beginning.[13] The breaking point came half a century after the Synod of Diamper when in 1653 many Malankara Christians took an oath to severe all relationship with the Catholic Church. This marked the first split among the Malankara Christians with the pro-Catholic group forming what came to be known as the *Pazhayakoor* (old party) and the independent group the *Puthenkoor* (new party).[14]

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[10] Susan Visvanathan. 1993. *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual Among the Yakoba*. Madras: Oxford University Press. p. 15

[11] Keay. *A History of the Syrian Church in India*. p. 41. See also Michael Geddes. 1694. *The History of the Church of Malabar*. London: S. Smith and B. Walford, Scariah Zacharia, ed. 1994. *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*. Edamattom: Indian Institute of Christian Studies.

[12] Cited A. Mathias Mundadan. 1970. *Sixteenth Century Traditions of St Thomas Christians*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India. p. 158

[13] A. Mathias Mundadan. 1967. *St. Thomas Christians 1498-1552*. Bangalore: Dharmaram College. p. 83

[14] For a critique of these terms, see Juhanon Marthoma. 1968. *Christianity in India and a Brief History of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*. Madras: K. M. Cherian. p. 15

The resistance to Latin domination and the subsequent relationship with the non-Chalcedonian Church of the near-Eastern Provinces catalysed a trend against images within the *Puthenkoor* Christians. As a result, they ceased the Roman practice of venerating images.[15] A Bishop Ivanios from Bozra who came to Kerala in 1741 is reported to have travelled in the region in an iconoclastic spree breaking the images of Mary installed in the Churches and advising others to do the same.[16] It is interesting to note that many of the *Puthenkoor* Christians continued to venerate icons and images until the nineteenth century, making such images one of the objects of reformation.[17]

2.2.3 Anglican missionaries and the reform movement

The reformation in the Malankara Church, which paved the way for the formation of the Marthoma Church, was influenced by the work of Anglican missionaries. Of the various missions, it is the Church Missionary Society (CMS), having commenced its activities in 1816 in central Kerala, which had the closest relationship with the Malankara Christians. They had very cordial relations with the Malankara metropolitan who in turn was supportive of their efforts to translate the Bible into the vernacular, to establish a theological seminary at Kottayam and to facilitate the spread of English education.[18] Even though this relationship was broken in 1836, the missionary initiatives in education and the translation of the Bible made a significant contribution to the reformation in the Malankara Church.[19]

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[15] A. T. Philip. 1991. *The Mar Thoma Church and Kerala Society*. Thiruvananthapuram: Juhanon Mar Thoma Study Centre. p. 32

[16] Philip. *The Mar Thoma Church and Kerala Society*. p. 32. Also see Brown. *Indian Christians of St. Thomas*. pp. 119–120

[17] They are still popular with the non-reformed (Orthodox/ Jacobite) group in Kerala. For a description of some of these images, See Richards. *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*. p. 23

[18] The efforts of these and other missionaries in the field of education have contributed to the distinguished educational status of Kerala. Missionaries initiated Malayalam education in addition to conducting worship and preaching in Malayalam. See C. M. Augur. 1990. *Church History of Travancore*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, Eira Dalton. 1963. *The Baker Family in India*. Kottayam: C. M. S. Press.

[19] For details, see Mathew and Thomas. *The Indian Churches of Saint Thomas*. pp. 44–73

2.2.4 Formation of the Marthoma Church

A group from the Malankara Church was attracted to the teachings of the CMS missionaries but was not inclined to leave the church and join the Anglican Church.[20] Instead, they wanted to reform the Malankara Church from within. This desire was fulfilled under the leadership of two *Malpans* (teachers), Palakkunnath Abraham and Kaithayil Geevarghese who were close associates of the CMS missionaries and were teachers at the seminary in Kottayam.

They signalled reformation mainly through two acts.[21] Firstly, Abraham Malpan threw into a well the image of a deceased bishop called *Muthappan*, which was venerated in and around Maramon, his birth place. Secondly, he revised and translated the St. James liturgy from Syriac into Malayalam and celebrated *Qurbana*[22] in the vernacular in his parish in Maramon in 1836.[23] It was indeed a revolution because the translation of prayers from Syriac to Malayalam was considered to be sinful in those days.[24] It was also a challenge to the tradition of giving over-importance to Syriac to the point of considering the vernacular (Malayalam) as a degraded language.[25] In addition, simony was deplored, as was the burning of candles before images and the sounding of gongs and cymbals during the celebration of the Eucharist. The reformers' intention was mainly to return to the ancient faith and practices by eliminating the veneration of icons, prayer to the saints and supplications for the dead. They also wanted to promote a more participatory and scripture-based worship in the vernacular.[26] These efforts led to a long struggle

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[20] The Anglican Church later became part of the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947.

[21] For details of reformation, see C. E. Abraham. 1966. *Sabha Charithra Samgraham* (Brief History of the Church). Thiruvalla: Christian Literature Society, T. P. Abraham. 1986. *Naveekaranam: Thudakkavum Thudarchayum* (Reformation: Origin and Continuity). Thiruvalla: Author. See also, Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church: Heritage. http://www.marthomasyrianchurch.org/heritage.htm. Accessed on Thursday, December 09, 2004 at 18 hrs

[22] This is a Syriac word for Holy Communion. Marthomites continue to use it even after translating the liturgy into Malayalam. *Qurbana* literally means 'offering.'

[23] He not only translated the liturgy but also left out prayers, which he thought were unbiblical.

[24] K. N. Daniel. 1951. *Malankara Sabhayum Naveekaranavum Vistharicha Randam Pathippu* (Malankara Church and Reformation, Revised and Enlarged Edition). Thiruvalla: No publisher. pp. 10–11

[25] Daniel. *Kerala Christhava Samskaram*. p. 98. I shall discuss in Chapter Five a similar inclination among the families in this study to Malayalam television channels and programmes.

[26] See T. C. Chacko. 1937. *Sabha Charithra Samgraham* (A Brief History of the Church). Thiruvalla: TAM Press. p. 49

between the conservatives and the reformists within the *Puthenkoor*. In 1889, after a court battle, the conservative group came to be known as the Jacobite Church and reformists, the Marthoma Church.

The discussion so far suggests that the Marthomites emerged as a reformed group from among the Malankara Christians with strong anti-image tendencies and an affinity for the vernacular language. As I mention in the following sections, they continue to avoid the use of images in both public and private religious practices.

2.3 Religious and cultural practices: From resistance to adaptation

I have mentioned in the discussion above that a significant section of the Malankara Christians resisted the "ritual colonisation of Malabar" by the Portuguese. I have also suggested that Abraham Malpan and his associates chose not to join the Anglican missionaries. This does not mean that Malankara Christians or later the Marthomites have not been influenced by the faith traditions and cultures with which they have come into contact. Instead, as I argue in this section, they seem to have been willing to adapt their social, religious and cultural milieu while resisting attempts at co-option and absorption. Placid Podipara sums it up succinctly: "[They] are Hindus or Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Syro-Oriental in Worship."[27]

Just as Podipara tries to highlight the various types of adaptation in the life of Malankara Christians, in this section I suggest that many religious and cultural practices of the Marthomites show marks of interaction with the Hindu, Syrian, Latin, Kerala and Western cultures. I shall examine this in terms of worship, rituals and customs without making any value judgements except to suggest that Marthomites were adept in accommodating and adapting in a multi-religious and multicultural context.

2.3.1 Worship and worship place

From the names of the ecclesiastical offices to the architecture of the church buildings Marthomites demonstrate the incorporation of various cultures. It is believed that Buddhism was prevalent in Kerala before the popularisation of

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[27] Placid J. Podipara. 1973. "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. George Menachery. Trichur: The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India. p. 107

Hinduism and Hindu temples. Marthomites, like other Christians (except the Pentecostals and independent groups) in Kerala, continue to call their church building *Palli* which in the Pali language refers to the place where Buddhists congregate for S*angham* (meeting).[28] If Marthomites use a Buddhist term for their worship centre, they use Hindu and Syrian names to address their worship leaders. Thus, bishop is called *Thirumeni,* a similar word to that for the Hindu priestly caste (Brahmin). A priest is called *Atchan* or more formally *Cassanar* or *Kathanar,* the Kerala form of the Syriac equivalent *Quasisa.*[29]

In the same way the architecture of the church buildings testifies to their adaptation from Hindu, Syrian and Western architectures. Even though more churches have been built in the last few decades to resemble Western churches, the exterior of the Malankara churches looked like Hindu temples until the Portuguese period. What distinguished the church buildings from that of the temples were the crosses placed on the church roofs.[30] As in the Hindu temple, the churches had the prayer wick bronze lamp called *nilavilakku*, umbrellas and other paraphernalia.[31] However, unlike the temples, the interior of the church buildings were devoid of any images. Due to the influence of the Portuguese, the Catholic and the Orthodox churches now have images, crucifixes and icons in the church, whereas the Marthoma church building is bare except for a number of crosses. The cross in the Marthoma church is, however, the Persian cross.

The festivals of the Malankara Christians too bear a close resemblance to those of Hindus. Both Christians and Hindus use flagstaff, musical accompaniment of *vadyams* and *melams*[32]and accord the same type of reception to the festival procession. Sometimes special festival umbrellas called *Muthukkudas* are hired from temples for use in church festivals. What distinguished one's festival from the other's was again, as in the case of the church building, the presence of the Cross. For

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[28] Jose. *Kshethra Pravesana Vilambaram*. pp. 19–21

[29] Mundadan. *Sixteenth Century Traditions of St Thomas Christians*. p. 147

[30] For the parallel development between temple and church architecture, see Andrews Athapilly. 1973. "Kerala Church Architecture". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. Menachery. pp. 151–152.

[31] For details, see Podipara. "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship".

[32] Different combinations of wind and percussion instruments like flute, drums etc.

special processions the celebrant carries a Bible in his hands.[33] As the festivals are usually either in the name of the Patron Saint of the parish or in commemoration of a deceased bishop, they are still continued by the Catholic and Orthodox churches. However the Marthoma Church with its abandoning of prayers for the dead and the intercession of the Saints do not have festivals and processions. Instead, in line with her emphasis on Bible learning and personal piety, the Marthoma church has initiated and promoted conventions for the preaching of the gospel and spiritual revival. According to C. P. Mathew and M. M. Thomas, "[In] the Mar Thoma Church the Conventions took the place of the traditional Syrian Church festivals which had become morally degenerate and religiously idolatrous."[34] The most important of the conventions is the Maramon Convention which began in 1886 and is held annually in the month of February for a week in Maramon.[35] This is the biggest annual Christian gathering in Asia.

Marthomites consider Sunday worship to be very important.[36] The importance given to public worship (prayer time) is one of the things I will examine in relation to television viewing (prime time) in Part II. In Sunday worship Marthomites demonstrate the middle path they have taken between the eastern churches and the protestants. Like other eastern churches, the Marthoma church gives importance to the celebration of *Qurbana*. At the same time, she has adopted some protestant liturgical communications, for example sermons and hymns. The *Qurbana* liturgy is chanted using a Syriac tune even though the language used is Malayalam. Similarly the songs used in Sunday worship show accommodation and adaptation of varying cultural influences. For instance the songs sung during the *Qurbana* include different types of music such as western (hymns), Indian classical (*Karnatic music)* and the modern light music.

In addition to Sunday worship, cottage prayer meetings and domestic family prayer have also been considered important as part of the everyday life of the Malankara

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[33] Podipara. *The Thomas Christians*. p. 86

[34] Mathew and Thomas. *The Indian Churches of Saint Thomas*. p. 93

[35] K. K Kuruvilla. 1951. *A History of the Mar Thoma Church and its Doctrines*. Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India. p. 48. Also see K. K. Kuruvilla. 1942. *Studies on Revival in Kerala Churches*. Thiruvalla: Malayalam Christian Literature Society.

[36] There are many stories on the strict observance of Sundays, like Abraham Malpan taking disciplinary action against his relative for making his wife cook on a Sunday. See M. C. George. 1919. *Abraham Malpan*. Kottayam: K. V. Varghese. pp. 40–48

Christians. Again, I shall examine later in Chapter Seven the interaction between the domestic prayer time and prime time television. Family prayer is cited as another adaptation from Brahmins who had family shrines and daily worship. There was a time when houses, which are otherwise similar in architecture, could be distinguished by the prayer songs or chants emerging from them in the morning and evening. During family prayer the Jacobites/Orthodox families, in line with their practice in church, usually stand facing the east to recite the set prayers. They also may have an image of one of the 'saints' like *Parumala Thirumeni*[37] or 'St. George slaying the dragon' as a focus of attention and also may light *nilavilakku* before the image. True to the reformation tradition, Marthomites do not keep any images of the saints or light *nilavilakku*. Instead they squat on the floor or on a mat to pray. In earlier times when there was strict adherence to demarcated spaces within the household, prayer was one of the few occasions for the whole family to get together.[38] The family prayer includes Bible reading by one or more members of the family, singing of one or two devotional songs by all members and extemporaneous prayers by all or a few. Thus prayer time ensures democratic communication in the family except that patriarchy is reinforced in the final blessing which is pronounced only by the father.

The ideology of male domination is something that is widely prevalent among the Malankara Christians which are evident in many practices including television viewing as I discuss in Chapter Five. Irrespective of denominational or doctrinal differences, the Malankara Christians are united in affirming the patriarchal tradition in their reluctance to ordain women.[39] The Marthoma Church, however, has started to give more leadership roles to women in worship and administration.

The worship and other religious practices of the Marthomites, in short, reveal a process of adaptation and accommodation of various religious systems and traditions, but with a firm avoidance of the use of images and icons. Their ritual and customs also show adaptation within firm parameters.

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[37] A deceased bishop called Gregorios.

[38] I shall describe how television has increased such occasions of family get together later in Chapter Five.

[39] In the CSI, the central Kerala (Madhya Kerala) Diocese is one of the few dioceses which have not ordained women. It may not be a coincidence that this is the only CSI diocese in Kerala with a sizeable number of Malankara Christians.

2.3.2 Rituals and customs

As in the case of worship, Marthoma Christians have incorporated many of the rituals and customs from the so-called "high caste" Hindus and from other Christian denominations. The importance given to the cross and the presence of the *Kathanar* have given a Christian context to many of their otherwise local customs.[40] They have followed the caste Hindus in terms of dress, ornaments, games and food habits with certain alterations, and even caste practices like untouchability to some extent.[41]

Malankara Christians have localised some of the biblical customs and Christianised some of the local customs, which the Marthomites continue to follow. For instance, the names given at baptism are usually scriptural,[42] but instead of adopting biblical names as such they are given a distinctive Malabar flavour. Thus Jacob was changed to Chacko or Chackoppan while Thomas became Thommi, Thomman or Thomma. It was the same with feminine names: Mary became Mariamma or Marykutty, while Hannah was transformed to Annamma, Aniamma, or Annakkutty. Presently, in additional to biblical names there is an inclination to have anglicised names. For example, Annamma becomes Anna, Hana, or Ann, and Thomas becomes Tom and George becomes Geo or Joe. There is also an affinity with nicknames which are usually Sanskritic in form like, Shyama, Ashish, Sindu, Reena and Rohan which are common with Hindus, and a few like Jamima which is common with Muslims.

One of the customs that was Christianised relates to the schooling of children. Before the advent of nursery schools children were taught the alphabets at home. The Malankara Christian children, unlike the so-called "lower castes," who learn to write in sand, begin writing in rice like the so-called "higher castes."[43] However while the Hindu children commence their study with the invocation of the Hindu deity *Hari Sree Ganapathaye Nama*, the Christians start with *Sri Yesukristhu Nama*.[44]

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[40] Daniel. *Kerala Christhava Samskaram*. p. 54

[41] Alexander Cherukarakunnel. 1973. "Character and life style of Thomas Christians". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. Menachery. See also Joseph Kolengaden. 1973. "Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*.

[42] There were a few exceptions like George, Cyriac and Gregory.

[43] Kolengaden. "Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians". p. 130

[44] Means, Bless Hari Ganapati and Bless Jesus Christ respectively.

It is perhaps the marriage of Marthoma Christians that best shows the adaptation from both Hindu and western Christian customs. The custom of having the marriage sacrament in the church is believed to have begun only in the thirteenth century.[45] In the Marthoma Church the marriage sacrament has three parts: the blessing of the engagement rings, the blessing of the crown, and the tying of the *tali* with the gift of *manthrakodi*.[46] In the original Syriac liturgy from which the present one is adapted and translated, there is no practice of blessing the wedding rings. Thus, wedding rings can be seen as an adaptation from Western Christianity.

The marriage ceremony also shows the Christianising of two essential features of a Hindu wedding, *tali kettal* and *pudava kodukkal*.[47] Marthomites call *tali*, *minnu*. The fact that it is a cross, made of twenty-one minute beads, distinguishes it from the *tali*. As in the Hindu custom, the bridegroom gives the *pudava* (dress) to the bride, but it is called by a different name, *mantrakodi*.[48] The thread on which the *minnu* is suspended is taken from the *mantrakodi* as in the Brahmin custom.

The discussion in this section about the worship, rituals and customs of the Marthomites reveals that they have been accommodating and incorporating from their religious and cultural milieu without compromising their religious identity. I will suggest later that this pattern of accommodation and adaptation is something that Marthomites have adopted with regard to television as well. It has also become conspicuous from the above discussion that Marthomites have much more interactions with Hindus and their customs than they have with Muslims and their culture. This may perhaps be a reflection of the wider presence of Hindus in the central Kerala region where most Marthomites reside among a relatively negligible number of Muslims. I will suggest later in Chapter Seven that this lack of contact with Muslims has a bearing on their response to Muslim programmes on television as well.

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[45] K. V. Varughese. 1997. *Malankara Nazranikal: Paramparyavum Samskaravum* (Malankara Christians: Tradition and Culture). Kunnamkulam: Kunnamkulam—Malabar Diocese of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. p. 44

[46] *Tali* is a gold locket which a Brahmin (currently all Hindus) bridegroom ties around the neck of the bride. *Manthrakodi* is the dress the groom gives to the bride.

[47] *Tali kettal* means tying the *Tali*. *Pudava kodukkal* means giving of dress to the bride. See Kolengadan. "Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians". p. 129

[48] Podipara. "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship". p. 111

2.4 Media: Exclusion and embrace[49]

In this section I suggest that Marthomites avoided traditional media on the one hand and accepted oral and print media on the other. Analysing this selective media use, I suggest that the reason for their apparently contradictory media practice may have been to do with their tendency to avoid images and may also be an affirmation of their reformed-Christian identity.

2.4.1 Exclusion of traditional media

Like any oral culture Malankara Christians have striven to preserve their memory in mnemonic patterns like songs.[50] The most important songs of old in this connection are *Margamkali pattu*,[51] *Ramban pattu* and *Veeradiyan pattu*.[52] These and similar songs,[53] used mainly to preserve and propagate the St. Thomas tradition and biblical stories, were sung at special occasions such as church anniversaries or marriages. All these songs show the usage of Tamil, Latin, Syriac and Malayalam words which once again indicates the influence of the various languages with which the Christians were in touch. It is, however, interesting to note that these songs were set mostly to Syrian and Latin music rather than to the South Indian (Hindu) classical, *Karnatic* music.[54]

Except for such folk songs Marthomites seem to have been apprehensive of various traditional art forms, including drama, songs, dance and performing arts.[55] Though the exact reason for avoiding these art forms is not explained, their close association with Hindu religion may have been a cause. Kuruvilla George makes a helpful suggestion in this regard when he says, "Protestant denominations in particular

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[49] For part of the subtitle I am indebted to, Miroslav Volf. 1996. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

[50] For a detailed exposition of oral culture and its characteristics, see Walter J. Ong. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen. pp. 31–75

[51] For the origin and contents of *Margamkali pattu*, see Parett. *Malankara Nazranikal*. pp. 232–234

[52] *Veeradiyan Pattu* is sung by an attendant caste, *Panan*, who used to visit the Christian homes on occasions like marriages to sing in return for presents.

[53] See Chummar Choondal. 1981. "Folk traditions of Kerala Christians". In *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, ed. K. J. John. Cochin: George Veliparampil. pp. 111–112

[54] Chummar Choondal. 1973. "Songs, Arts, Festivals of the Thomas Church". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. Menachery. p. 168

[55] For a detailed description of these forms, see Menon. *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*. pp. 249–275

distanced themselves from the performing arts mainly on account of the associations of the latter with immorality, hedonism and with Hinduism."[56] Marthomites seem to have shared this perception despite following, unlike the Protestants, a highly dramatic form of liturgy and five-sense oriented worship.[57]

In India various traditional media have originated in close association with Hindu religion and its practices. "The traditional and folk forms such as music, dance, drama and puppet theatre grew out of the ancient Indian troupes which went from place to place performing to the public."[58] As these performances were based primarily on Hindu epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat* it must have been natural for the traditional and folk forms to carry on the same tradition and become part of Hindu worship. For instance, Hindu mythology, according to Bharat Muni,[59] incorporates drama as a form of prayer. Similarly dance and music were also considered part of Hindu mythology with the God Nataraja (*Shiv*) himself being considered to be the lord of the dance. Most of the performing arts such as the now world-famous *Kathakali* of Kerala and others like *Koodiyattam*, *Krishnanattam*, *Thullal*, *Chakkiarkoothu*, *Mohiniyattam* and *Thiruvathira* are performed exclusively in praise of Hindu gods and/or intimately identified with Hindu practices. Most of these performances are sponsored by Hindu kings/lords and/or held under the auspices of temples where Christians are not permitted to enter. Such an exclusive identification of traditional media with Hinduism and temples seems to have denied Christians the necessary exposure to adapt them. Conversely, Marthomites may have resolved to avoid them as part of affirming their distinctive Christian identity. The latter is more probable considering the fact that even today when these media can be adapted, Marthomites, unlike the Catholics, are not enthusiastic about doing so even on an experimental basis.[60]

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[56] Kuruvilla George. 1999. From People's Theatre to People's Eucharist: Resources from Popular Theatre for Eucharistic Reform in the Church of South India, Kerala State. PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh. p. 120

[57] I shall describe a similar perception towards films in Chapter Four.

[58] Usha Reddi. 1989. "Media and Culture in Indian Society: Conflict or Co-operation?" *Media, Culture and Society* 11, no. 4. p. 403

[59] His treatise on Indian dramaturgy, *Natya Shastra*, served as "the fountainhead of Indian performing arts." Reddi. "Media and Culture in Indian Society". p. 398

[60] Marthomites, in this sense, are like the Church of South India which, according to George "has turned a blind eye to performing arts in general." George. From People's Theatre to People's Eucharist. p. 142. The Catholic Church in India has many centres adapting various media in worship.

The reluctance of Marthomites to go to see films is something that I mentioned earlier[61] and will discuss in detail in later chapters. Suffice it to say, a striking parallel exists between their opposition to traditional media and their approach to films. Considering the facts that films in India are "uniquely Indian,"[62] in having a combination of songs, dance and drama which Marthomites avoided, and that most of the earlier films were based on Hindu mythology, one could presume that the Marthomites would have carried over their apprehension of traditional media to films as well.

The avoidance of traditional media has been strengthened greatly by many foreign missionaries who displayed a negative attitude to them. This perhaps would have stifled any feeble attempts at adapting the traditional media by the local Christians. Sabina Raphy captures this when she says, "The Romish missionaries strictly prohibited their converts from practising rituals which had a Hindu colour and participating in the arts of Kerala such as *Koothu, Kathakali, Kootiyattam.*"[63] The Anglican missionaries also seem to have shared a similar perception fitting their reformation background which was suspicious of the use of drama and other arts in worship[64] and the Anglican form of worship and music they left with the Church of South India.

Alternatively, the missionaries have tried to present Christians in Kerala with western Christian folk traditions, customs and practices. One such form is *Chavittunatakam,* an ancient Christian theatre introduced by the Portuguese. "It developed here as a counterpart of *Kathakali* or an imitation of *Kootiyattam* the traditional Sanskrit drama."[65] However, they have not become popular among the

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For example, see D. S. Amalorpavadass. 1982. *NBCLC Campus: Milieu of God-Experience, An Artistic Synthesis of Spirituality*. Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre.

[61] Introduction (i)

[62] Binod C. Agrawal. 1998. "Cultural Influence of Indian Cinema on Indian Television". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia: Political Economic and Cultural Implications*, ed. Srinivas R. Melkote, Peter Shields, and Binod C. Agrawal. Lanham: University Press of America, Inc. p. 126

[63] Sabeena Raphy. 1981. "Theatrical traditions of Christians in Kerala". In *Christian Heritage of India*, ed. John. p. 99

[64] Mark Earey. 1997. *Worship as Drama*. Cambridge: Grove Books. p. 12

[65] Choondal. "Songs, Arts, Festivals of the Thomas Church". p. 169

Marthomites when compared with another contribution of the missionaries, that is, print medium.

2.4.2 Embrace of print media

Western missionaries have contributed immensely to the development of Malayalam prose and the growth of the language in Kerala.[66] Both Latin and Protestant missionaries strove to promote the everyday language of the people rather than the Sanskritic literary language used by the 'elite' sections of society. This paved the way for the phenomenal development of the popular language. Inspired by the need to communicate the gospel, the missionaries learnt Malayalam, standardised the oral and written language in terms of dictionaries and disseminated it through print media.[67]

Although the printing press was introduced by the Jesuit missionaries in Kerala in the early seventeenth century (1605),[68] it was widely and rapidly spread only in the nineteenth century with the initiative of the Protestant missionaries (CMS) and English education.[69] Ecclesiastically, it is the translation and printing of the Bible in 1829 that became one of the most important contributions of the western missionaries to the Christians in Kerala.

If traditional media became identified with Hinduism, print media was mostly in the possession of the church and the missionaries.[70] This proximity between print media and Christians may have enabled Christians to use this medium the most. The publication of Christian books was more regularly and systematically carried on by organised Christian bodies than by any other religious groups.[71] They became

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[66] P. V. Velayudhan Pillai. 1981. "Christian Missionaries and the Modern Malayalam prose". In *Christian Heritage of India*, ed. John.

[67] S. Velayudhan. "Foreign Missionaries and Malayalam Lexicography". In *Christian Heritage of India*. For the same process in a different context, see Knut Lundby. 1998. *Longing and Belonging: Media and the Identity of Anglicans in a Zimbabwean Growth Point*. Report Series-34. Oslo: Dept. of Media and Communication, University of Oslo. p. 95

[68] T. M. Chummar. 1973. "Printing and Printing Presses". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. Menachery. p. 161

[69] George Veliparambil. 1981. "Early printing and origin of the press in Kerala: Contributions of Christian missionaries". In *Christian Heritage of India*, ed. John. p. 164. Also see J. V. Vilanilam. 1987. *Religious Communication in India*. Trivandrum: Kairali Books International. pp. 53–69

[70] The Travancore government followed suit in starting a printing press copying the fonts from the CMS Press of Bailey. See Chummar. "Printing and Printing Presses".

[71] Augur. *Church History of Travancore*. p. 1053

pioneers in the field of printing, journalism and newspaper/magazine publishing.[72] In short, the concerted efforts of the missionaries and the local priests seem to have given the medium a wider acceptance among Christians.

Perhaps this in part explains the readiness with which the Marthoma Church embraced the print medium. The reformers and their followers were eager to read and study the Bible and also to use devotional hymns, which were largely possible only with the help of print media. Along with the devotional use of the medium, the Marthoma Church began publishing a magazine called *Sabha Tharaka* in 1893 with the express intention of strengthening her members in their faith and also communicating her position to the outside world.[73] In addition to this monthly official magazine[74] almost every organisation and dioceses of the church started to have separate magazines/publications for public relations and devotional purposes. The Marthoma Church Publication Board formed in 1934 is entrusted with the task of publishing worship and hymn books along with other books that nurture the church members in their personal and social life.[75] This board coordinates the functions of the Marthoma Printing press and Marthoma Book Depot. In order to encourage the literary work of her members the Marthoma church has instituted an award for the best literary publication by one of her members every year.

The discussion so far reveals that the Marthoma Church accepted print media for communication within and without. They were selective in their media use, excluding on the one hand the media used by Hindus and embracing on the other hand the print media popularised by Christian missionaries. As the church has not been using traditional media or films, it can be said that print media remains the most used medium (other than oral media) by the Marthoma Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their almost exclusive reliance on this medium has come to reflect an increasingly word and print oriented ecclesial communication.

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[72] John Pallissery. 1973. "Thomas Christians and Journalism". In *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, II. ed. Menachery. p. 165

[73] C. A. George, (Convenor). 1983. Mar Thoma Syrian Church Directory: Thiruvalla: Publication Board of the Mar Thoma Church. p. 262

[74] For a brief history and contribution of *Tharaka*, see Mathew Daniel. 1995. *Bhoomiyude Uppu Lokathinte Velicham* (Salt of the Earth, Light of the World). Thiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithy. pp. 38–46.

[75] K. T. Joy. 1986. *The Mar Thoma Church: A study of its Growth and Contribution*. Kottayam: Author. p. 125.

2.5 Conclusion

My attempt in this chapter has been to describe the Marthomites in terms of their religion, culture and media. I have demonstrated that historically the separate existence of Marthomites among the St. Thomas Christians is the result of a reformation, which in part was a communication "revolution" that vernacularized church communication.[76] The analysis of their religious and cultural practices has demonstrated accommodation and adaptation and resistance to attempts of absorption and assimilation. I have suggested that they have incorporated the local and foreign, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist, participatory and patriarchal aspects in their worship, rituals and customs. They have indigenised the Christian practices and Christianised the local ones. What is not tolerated, however, either from local or from foreign influences, is icons and images.

The media use of Marthomites has shown a selective practice of avoiding traditional media and performing arts on the one hand and accepting print media on the other. Their avoidance of traditional media may well defy the principle of adaptation that they have shown in other aspects of life. I, however, pointed out that their fear of absorption into Hindu religion and its iconography coupled with a lack of exposure to traditional media may have been responsible for this. I also showed that print medium was in the beginning a Christian missionary venture and this could have made Marthomites use the medium without any apprehension and with confidence.

I emphasised in this chapter that Marthomites are a reformed ecclesial group combining features of both Eastern and Western Christianity. Though they accommodated and adapted from their religio-cultural milieu they have resisted the use of traditional and image based media. It is to this context that television has gained entry setting the questions of this research. Being to some extent the product of print medium and modernity and at the same time hesitant to embrace other modern media like films, how do Marthoma Christians incorporate television: the symbol of audio-visual medium par excellence? As part of answering this question let me first introduce the research processes and profiles of those who participated in the field research.

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[76] See Introduction 2.1

Chapter Three
Doing Qualitative Research in Kerala

3.1 Introduction

In this the last of the background chapters, I introduce the field research done in Kerala describing, self-reflectively, the processes and the participants of the research. With this, the context is set for analysing the field data in Part II.

In this chapter I proceed in two sections addressing the 'what, how, and who' questions of field research.[1] In the first section I explore the processes or the 'what' and 'how' of research, describing the various stages of the field work. I shall also discuss the role of the researcher and the limitations of the method. In the second section I address the 'who' question of research by giving a profile of each of the twenty families that participated in the field study. The profile gives a brief account of the family in terms of their material and domestic context, the placement of television and the demographic details of the family members.

The methodology is discussed in great detail because, as a qualitative study, the validity and reliability of the present research is not in its replicability but in the detailed description of and reflection on the processes. For reception analysis,[2] as in other qualitative studies, it is important to understand the context and the collaborators that generate the data. In other words, the research processes and the research participants are equally important as the product of field research itself. While I focus on the processes and the producers in this chapter, the product of field research becomes the focus in Part II.

3.2 Processes of research

In this section, I argue that a qualitative ethnographic method is an appropriate choice for the present study. I then describe the various stages in the field research such as the selection of the families, conduct of the interviews and the post-field analysis.

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[1] Arthur Asa Berger. 1998. *Media Research Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 159

[2] For a discussion on reception analysis see Introduction (v.i)

3.2.1 Rationale for the qualitative ethnographic method

The selection of the research method is to be determined by the subject of research rather than any other criterion, let alone by the current fashion in the area of study.[3] Jack Douglas makes a helpful point in saying, "don't use steam rollers to catch butterflies."[4] For the present study I chose a qualitative rather than a quantitative method for at least three reasons.[5]

Firstly, a qualitative method is more suitable to study the everyday life and practices of people.[6] As my focus is to understand how Marthoma families incorporate television into their everyday life it would have been impossible to collect the life stories through quantitative methods of questionnaire or social survey. As Denzin and Lincoln comment:

> The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape enquiry... Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning.[7]

Everyday life is not a commodity to be quantified. It is rather a process that can only be described in its context. As Steinar Kvale has rightly suggested, to obtain the nuances of description of the people's life world we need a qualitative method which works with words and not with numbers.[8]

Secondly, qualitative method helps, as David Silverman suggests, to "focus on actual practice *in situ*, looking at how social interactions are routinely *enacted*."[9] In other

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[3] Martyn Hammersley. 1992. *What is Wrong with Ethnography? Methodological Explorations*. London: Routledge. p. 172

[4] Jack D. Douglas. 1985. *Creative Interviewing*. Beverly Hills: Sage. p. 23

[5] For a brief description of the main quantitative methods, see Alan Bryman. 1988. *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. London: Unwin Hyman. pp. 11–12

[6] David Silverman. 2000. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage. p. 1

[7] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2000. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 8

[8] Steinar Kvale. 1996. *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 30

[9] Silverman. *Doing Qualitative Research*. p. 89

words, unlike in quantitative research where the interest is in finding "common denominators in the highest number of participants" [10] my focus in this study is in "patterns of interrelationship between many categories"[11] and the details of people's lives. Qualitative method "tells us what people think and do, not how many of them think and do it."[12] In this sense, Silverman is right in suggesting that qualitative method has the potential to provide a "deeper understanding of social phenomena" like those of inner experiences, language, cultural meanings or forms of social interaction.[13] As people are different and active their experiences with television are varied and hence important. It is only in qualitative analysis that such diversity of experience is emphasised as a constitutive element of social practice[14] and in which enough room is given for the individual voices.[15]

Thirdly, qualitative ethnographic method is almost a theoretical prerequisite of reception analysis.[16] The basic premise of this study is that audiences are active in their negotiations with television. Thus it is only appropriate that such a study of active audiences should employ a method, which ensures their 'active' participation. Adoption of quantitative methods such as a standardised questionnaire or structured interviews that imply homogeneity and passivity of audiences would be contradictory to the theoretical grounding of the present research. As feminists argue, "stripping away of context, the reduction of information to summary numbers, and the interchangeability of interviewees of quantitative methods seems dehumanising."[17] The need therefore is for "more interactive, contextualised methods in the search for pattern and meaning rather than prediction and control."[18] The best

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[10] Sylvia M. Klauser. 2002. Whose Ethos? Whose Ethics?: The Contributions of Anabaptist Theology and Ethics to Contemporary Biomedical Ethics. PhD Thesis, The University of Edinburgh. p. 50

[11] Grant McCracken. 1988. *The Long Interview*. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 16

[12] McCracken. *The Long Interview*. p. 49

[13] Silverman. *Doing Qualitative Research*. p. 89

[14] Klaus Bruhn Jensen. 1991. "Introduction: The Qualitative Turn". In *A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research*, ed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski. London: Routledge. p. 2

[15] Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London: Sage. p. 32

[16] Barrie Gunter. 2000. *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*. London: Sage. p. 19

[17] Rubin and Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing*. p. 36

way to understand how Marthomites incorporate television into their everyday life is to ask them without supplying ready made answers.

Such a theoretically informed selection of qualitative method does not mean that one should eschew quantitative methods in audience analysis.[19] For example, in order to understand the quantity of television viewed among a large number of Marthoma families, a quantitative survey questionnaire would be an appropriate method to gain a standardised result. Since the focus in this study has not been on issues such as the amount of television watched, but on how that time is spent with television, a qualitative method like ethnographic interview becomes the most suitable choice.

3.2.1.1 Ethnographic interview

Ethnography in media studies is a method for investigating the social world of actual audiences.[20] Ethnography has been in use mainly in anthropology, where it was formerly used primarily to understand an unknown or alien culture or people. A classic example in this regard is given by James Spradley in his description of fieldwork. According to him, doing fieldwork, which is the hallmark of cultural anthropology, means:

> Asking questions, eating strange foods, learning a new language, watching ceremonies, taking field notes, washing clothes, writing letters home, tracing out genealogies, observing play, interviewing informants, and hundreds of other things.[21]

There are similarities and differences between fieldwork in anthropology and audience studies. Anthropological ethnography based on participant observation taking several years and reception studies based on taped conversations of an hour or so are, indeed, different. But they do share some of the chores that Spradley has recounted and more importantly "some of the general intentions."[22] A reception

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[18] Patti Lather. 2003. "Feminist Perspectives on Empowering Research Methodologies". In *Interviewing*, II. ed. Nigel Fielding. London: Sage. p. 152

[19] There are researchers who argue for a combination of both methods or the selection of each depending on the subject of research. See, David Silverman. 1993. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage. p. 11, Martin Trow. 2003."Comment on "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison"". In *Interviewing*, III. ed. Fielding. p. 305

[20] Shaun Moores. 1993. *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*. London: Sage. p. 3

[21] James P. Spradley. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Rinehart and Winston. p. 3

[22] Moores. *Interpreting Audiences*. p. 4

study, like anthropological research, is concerned "with questions of meaning and social context and with charting the 'situational embeddedness' of cultural practices."[23] This causes some of the media researchers to argue that reception studies can be properly called ethnographies.[24]

There are two principal ethnographic methods in reception analysis: participant observation and ethnographic interview.[25] The present study is born out of my participation with, and observation of, Marthoma families and their experience of television as a fellow Marthomite and parish priest. Again, as the family profiles in the next section will indicate, I observed the placement of the television set, arrangement of the living room and decorations in terms of images and pictures in the house during the field work. However, I did not adopt 'participant observation' as a research method in the technical sense of the term in media studies, since it is usually used for "on-line" research, which measures audience responses at the time of media exposure.[26] Unlike in the methods of online research, I have not been watching television with the participants or using methods like video recording or audience tracking to study television viewing. In this sense, this present study could be called "off-line" research.[27] Consequently my aim was not to 'observe' what the families did at a given point in time, or to ascertain the truth or falsehood of their accounts. Instead, my concern is to know how the families give structure and meaning to their experience with television.[28] In other words, the intention here is to understand how the families give account of their media use.[29]

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[23] Moores. *Interpreting Audiences*. p. 4

[24] Moores. *Interpreting Audiences*. p. 4. Some others like Seiter suggest, however, that "most of the time 'ethnographic' has been used very loosely to indicate any research that uses qualitative interviewing techniques." Ellen Seiter. 1999. *Television and New Media Audiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 10

[25] Gunter. *Media Research Methods*. p. 126. Gunter cites some of the research in media studies that used these and other qualitative methods such as audience reports and diaries. See pp. 129–133

[26] Gunter. *Media Research Methods*. p. 191

[27] Gunter. *Media Research Methods*. p. 191

[28] Mark Neumann and David Eason. 1990. "Casino World: Bringing it All Back Home". *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1. p. 45

[29] For a detailed theoretical discussion on accounts of media use, see various contributions in Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane F. Alters. 2004. *Media, Home, and Family*. New York: Routledge.

I chose an interview method that would elicit and document these media accounts. Both quantitative and qualitative methods employ the interview method, but the ethnographic interview differs from the quantitative interview mainly in the role given to the interview participants. As Rubin and Rubin argue:

> Unlike survey interviews, in which those giving information are relatively passive and are not allowed the opportunity to elaborate, interviewees in qualitative interviews share in the work of the interview, sometimes guiding it in channels of their own choosing. They are treated as partners rather than as objects of research.[30]

Because of this difference in perception, usually quantitative interviews employ standardised and closed-end questions to a large number of random samples whereas an ethnographic interview prefers semi-structured, open-ended questions to small samples.[31] Thus, the qualitative or ethnographic interview "provides us with means for exploring the point of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality."[32]

Interview is a method modelled on the everyday reality of conversation and hence can be called an extended conversation to generate knowledge about a specific subject in a particular context.[33] As in daily lives, it involves the art of asking questions and listening. An interview, Kvale argues, is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest."[34] This highly focused "conversation with a purpose,"[35] has the scope to generate a large amount of data. [36]

The basis of the qualitative interview method is the concept that knowledge is the product of interaction and it is "situated and contextual."[37] So, unlike John Chirban's

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[30] Rubin and Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing*. p. 10

[31] Silverman. *Doing Qualitative Research*. p. 89

[32] Jody Miller and Barry Glassner. 1997. "The 'Inside' and the 'Outside': Finding Realities in Interviews". In *Qualitative Research*, ed. Silverman. p. 100

[33] Rubin and Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing*. p. 129. They also cite the differences between interview and conversation. See p. 2

[34] Kvale. *InterViews*. p. 2

[35] Liz Edwards. 1997. *Interviewing*. London: The Industrial Society. p. xii

[36] Berger. *Media Research Techniques*. p. 55. This scope can also prove to be its undoing by producing a large amount of material making complete transcription and analysis impossible. Other problems of this method are discussed later in this section.

[37] Jennifer Mason. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage. p. 62

suggestion, it is not just the "inner view"[38] of the participants that becomes important in an interview situation. On the contrary, as Andrea Fontana and James Frey suggest, "each interview context is one of interaction and relation: the result is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies."[39] James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium echo the same perception in saying that:

> Meaning is socially constituted: all knowledge is created from the action taken to obtain it...Treating interviewing as a social encounter leads us rather quickly to the possibility that the interview is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself.[40]

In short, the nature of the interview process has a profound influence on the knowledge generated. It is important to mention that in this type of interview the participants are not considered 'minefields,' from which information is excavated with sophisticated questioning.[41] Instead, interviewing is a collaborative act where both the researcher and the participants construct together a narrative and its meanings.[42] Obviously, in such an act both the interviewer and the interview participants are deemed to be active and engaged in meaning-making work.[43]

Ethnographic or in-depth interviews do not have a rigidly set structure. For this reason they are sometimes called semi-structured interviews.[44] According to Seidman, "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the

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[38] John T. Chirban. 1996. *Interviewing in Depth: The Interactive-Relational Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. xi

[39] Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey. 2000."The Interview: From Structural Questions to Negotiated Text". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Denzin and Lincoln. p. 647

[40] James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1997. "Active Interviewing". In *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. David Silverman. London: Sage. p. 3

[41] Holstein and Gubrium disclaim another such metaphor, "treasuries of information." See Holstein and Gubrium. "Active Interviewing". p. 114

[42] Thomas A. Schwandt. 2001. *Qualitative Inquiry: A Dictionary of Terms*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 136

[43] Holstein and Gubrium. "Active Interviewing". p. 114. See also James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1995. *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 4

[44] They are also called focussed interviews. See, Robert K. Merton, Majorie Fiske and Patricia L. Kendall. 1990. *The focussed interviews: A Manual of Problems and Procedures*. New York: Free Press. The other types of interviews include 'structured' and 'unstructured' interviews. For various forms of interviews, see Fontana and Frey. "The Interview". pp. 645–653. See also, Norman K. Denzin. 1970. *The Research Act in Sociology: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. London: Butterworths. pp. 123–126

experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience."[45] In this method, the interview may begin with a particular set of questions or themes, but they are not asked in a mechanical order thus making it a survey. Rather the researcher can adapt as the situation changes and is entirely free to ask follow-up questions in response to the participants'[46] answers and interests, to rephrase a question, or to ask for clarification of interesting points.[47] In other words, each interview becomes an event in itself and provides an invaluable setting for the production of knowledge.

However, there are problems with the ethnographic interview method.[48] There is a possibility that the focus on "conscious and articulable behaviour" will become "reified and over-specific."[49] There is also a problem with the experiences claimed to have been elicited through the interview method. It is realistic to remind ourselves that what we collect in interviews are not experiences but only their articulation and that too in what Scheurich calls "persistently slippery, unstable" language.[50] As Denzin rightly cautions, the language which narrates the lived experience, "displaces

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[45] Irving Seidman. 1998. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University. p. 3, Silverman. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. p. 91

[46] Different scholars give the interview participants various names. Some of them use the term interviewee or respondent. See Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage, Stephen A. Richardson, Barbara S. Dohrenwend and David Klein. 1965. *Interviewing: Its Forms and Functions*. New York: Basic Books. Another category used is 'subject'. For example, Daphne Patai. 1987. "Ethical Problems of Personal Narratives, or Who Should Eat the Last Piece of Cake?" *International Journal of Oral History* 8, no. 1. Anthropologists use the term 'informant'. See, Roy F. Ellen. 1984. *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*. London: Academic press. Rubin and Rubin call them in various names like informants, interviewees and conversational partners. Rubin and Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing*. Some others refer to them as narrators. See Holstein and Gubrium. *The Active Interview*.

Likewise the researcher or interviewer is also called by different names like investigator or facilitator. See Esther Madriz. 1997. *Nothing Bad Happens to Good Girls: The Impact of Fear of Crime on Women's lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, McCracken. *The Long Interview*.

In this study I use the term interview participants or participants to acknowledge the active participation of the family members in the interview. See also, Seidman. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. p. 8, Shulamint Reinharz. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 22

[47] Susanna Hornig Priest. 1996. *Doing Media Research: An Introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 26

[48] For ten standard objections to interview research, see Kvale. *InterViews*. pp. 281–290. For a postmodernist critique, see James J. Scheurich. 1997. *Research Method in the Postmodern*. London: Falmer. pp. 61–79

[49] Jonathan Bignell. 2000. *Postmodern Media Culture*. Edinburgh: University Press. p. 181

[50] Scheurich. *Research Method in the Postmodern*. p. 62

the very thing it is supposed to represent, so that what is always given is a trace of other things, not the thing—lived experience—itself."[51]

Another problem with the interview method stems from its situational character. As the outcome of the interview depends on those who take part in it and the situation of the interview, problems with any one of the constituents can influence the outcome. In other words, besides the context of the interview, the behaviour patterns, relationship skills and articulation of both the interviewer and the participants become very crucial and can be potential sources of problems.[52] For instance, in my method of interviewing family members together some family members were shy and less articulate than others. In addition, the context of the interview, the family context, with its own dynamics and power play can also regulate the expression of its members. If the researcher is not a native or is someone who has a great social distance from the participants there could be added problems not only in gaining trust but also in understanding the participants' language and "mechanisms of symbolization."[53] In such case the participants may not tell the researcher what s/he wants to know or may "tend to reply to questions in terms of what they perceive to be the most socially desirable response."[54]

Apart from the problems mentioned above, the asymmetrical relationship between the interviewer and the interview participants can be another source for trouble. Despite conscious attempts to acknowledge and maintain the 'co-authorship'[55] of the participants, the interview relationship is not necessarily reciprocal. In other words,

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[51] Norman K. Denzin. 1991. "Representing Lived Experiences in Ethnographic Texts". *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 12. p. 68

[52] For some of the problems such as ego-threat, degrees of forgetting and degrees of generalising that can happen in interview, see Raymond L. Gorden. 2003. "Dimensions of the Depth Interview". In *Interviewing*, I. ed. Nigel Fielding. London: Sage. pp. 171–174

[53] Denzin. *The Research Act in Sociology*. p. 130. See also, Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer. 1957. "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison". Human Organization 16. no. 3. pp. 28–32

[54] Denzin. *The Research Act in Sociology*. p. 129. See also, Miller and Glassner. "The 'Inside' and the 'Outside'". p. 101, E. C. Wragg. 1978. *Conducting and Analysing Interviews: Rediguide 11*. Guides in Educational Research. no place: University of Nottingham School of Education. p. 4

[55] I am indebted to Michael Real for this term. He uses 'co-author' to refer to audiences as they produce meanings from television. I use the term here to suggest that what is generated in the interview is co-authored by the participants. See Michael R. Real. 1996. *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide*. Communication and Human Values. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. xviii

interview is not a dialogue of equal partners or an everyday conversation. As Ellen Seiter rightly cautions:

> Cultural studies must focus on the differences in class and cultural capital, which typify the relationship between the academic and the subject of audience studies. Nowhere is this more vivid than in the study of television.[56]

Awareness of the potential problems mentioned above was helpful in minimizing them in the conduct of the interviews. I also made deliberate attempts to minimize the status difference and to do "away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing."[57] One way to achieve this, Fontana and Frey suggest, is for the interviewers to show "their human side and answer questions and express feelings."[58] Feminist researchers emphasize such sharing, suggesting that there is "no intimacy without reciprocity."[59] I also found that the unstructured or semi-structured character of the interview could decrease the control of the researcher in influencing the direction of the conversation.[60] The least a researcher could do is to be aware of this asymmetrical relationship, to describe the process of research in detail and to take responsibility for the research texts.

3.2.2 Process of data collection

Having explained the rationale for the choice of my research method, in the rest of this section I focus on the process of data collection, describing mainly the location and selection of the research participants for the pilot and main study, the conduct of the interviews and my role as a researcher in the whole process.[61]

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[56] Ellen Seiter. 1990. "Making Distinctions in TV Audience Research: Case Study of a Troubling Interview". *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1. p. 61

[57] Fontana and Frey. "The Interview". p. 658

[58] Fontana and Frey. "The Interview". p. 658

[59] Ann Oakley. 1981. "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms". In *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. Helen Roberts. London: Routledge. p. 49. See also Anne S. Kasper. 2003."A Feminist Qualitative Methodology: A Study of Women with Breast Cancer". In *Interviewing*, II. ed. Fielding.

[60] Also see Esther Madriz. 2000."Focus Groups in Feminist Research". In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Denzin and Lincoln. p. 840

[61] The term 'data collection' is criticised as it gives an indication of a mechanical 'mining' of information. Instead it is pointed out that interview is an occasion of 'data making' or 'data generation.' See, Carolyn Baker. 1997. "Membership Categorization and Interview Accounts". In *Qualitative Research*, ed. Silverman. p. 131. Though I agree with Baker, 'data collection' in this study refers to the whole process of constructing, recording and transcribing the interview narratives.

3.2.2.1 Research Contexts

3.2.2.1.1 Pilot study

Before conducting the main study in India, I conducted a pilot interview in London in February 2001. A Marthoma family was selected for this interview, as there was no possibility of visiting India. The pilot interview was an open unstructured audio-taped conversation which lasted for an hour and a half. This is not included in the final analysis because it was conducted only for the design and proposal stage of the research. However, it was on the basis of this interview that the decision to adopt the semi-structured open-ended interview method was made. Besides helping in the choice of method, the pilot interview was also helpful in refining my interviewing skills.

3.2.2.1.2 Main Study

The main study was conducted in Kerala from April to July 2001. Interview participants were selected from four places in Kerala, namely, Thiruvalla, Keekozhoor, Kottayam and Thiruvananthapuram. The first two places are strongholds of Marthomites when compared to the latter. Before arriving in each place the vicar of the local Marthoma church was contacted to inform him about the fieldwork and to solicit his co-operation. The telephone was used to make the initial contact because of the geographical distance from my base to the places selected. In one place I visited some of the houses with an evangelist and in another place with a member of a youth group to find appropriate families.[62]

The interview plan was made in such a way that only one interview was conducted each day. This allowed for time to play back the audiotape on the day of the interview itself. Such preparation was helpful in interviewing subsequent families.

3.2.2.2 Research Sample

Instead of choosing families at random, a theoretical sampling method was accepted for this research. Jennifer Mason defines such sampling as "a set of procedures where the researcher manipulates their data generation, analysis, theory, and sampling activities *interactively* during the research process."[63] This means that

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[62] For the importance of a first visit, see, Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman. 1999. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 65

[63] Mason. *Qualitative Researching*. pp. 137–138

instead of finalising the duration of the field study and the sample size pre-meditatively at the design stage, theoretical sampling foresees such decisions being taken in the field itself.[64]

I have selected the families for this study on the basis of three criteria besides the obvious willingness of the participants. Firstly, the families were to have had television for a minimum of two and a maximum of seven years in the family. The assumption was that those who had acquired a television set recently would tend to use it more due to the 'novelty effect,' while those who had had it for more than seven years might take it for granted. Secondly, the families had to have a cable connection taking into account the fact that television viewing has become an everyday possibility in Kerala with the advent of cable channels. Thirdly, the families had to have members of at least two generations present at the time of the interview. This was to elicit the stories of television across various generations of family members. In fact many families were extended families, having three co-resident generations since such a joint family system is still prevalent in Kerala. Care was taken to include both Syrian and Dalit families from among the Marthoma Christians.[65] For purposes of comparison and to acknowledge the multi-religious context of television audiences in Kerala, I included a few Hindu and Muslim families as well. Accordingly three Hindu and two Muslim families were selected.

An important decision was taken in the field regarding the number of participant families. A strict adherence to the above mentioned criteria had resulted in the selection of only lower middle or working class Marthoma families. After interviewing eleven such Marthoma families I found that I had reached what is called a "saturation point."[66] Consequently I decided to stop interviewing any more of such families and to include a few middle or upper-middle class Marthomites without insisting on the duration of the television set at home or subscription to cable television. Thus four middle/upper-middle class families were added to the sample. Altogether twenty families were interviewed.

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[64] Mason. *Qualitative Researching*. p. 138

[65] Syrian Marthoma families denote those who claim membership of the church from the advent of Christianity in Kerala, while Dalit Marthomites are those who joined the Marthoma Church in recent times as a result of the evangelistic activity of the Church.

[66] 'Saturation' is the point where the researcher hears the same information repeated again and again and the prospect of different or new material diminishes. See Rubin and Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing*. p. 73, Seidman. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. p. 48

I did not interview any clergy or religious workers despite soliciting their help and enjoying their hospitality. This was mainly because of the problems in interviewing acquaintances and friends.[67] If friends are involved, especially from the same profession, it becomes difficult to attain the necessary distance for the interview relationship to develop on its own and not to take each other for granted.[68] The friendship may also pressurise the participants to perform or please the interviewer by saying what they perceive the interviewer wants.

The effort of making the sample as representative as possible does not mean that this study could be considered conclusive for all the audiences in Kerala. Strictly speaking generalisations are not possible and what is generated with these twenty families may be valid only for them. In fact the choice of a qualitative method in itself shows my contention that generalisation about audience behaviour is not a methodologically valid or achievable project. However, as Knut Lundby has rightly pointed out, "even one specific community could provide insights of wider relevance"[69] and this sample may have provided cultural connections and patterns relevant to other families and communities.

3.2.2.3 Family interviews in the domestic context

Families rather than individual members constituted the basic unit of the sample. The interview was conducted in homes so that the participants were met as a family and in their own viewing context. The decision to interview each family as a group was taken considering the fact that television viewing in India has emerged as a domestic practice and family has become, in James Lull's words, "the natural viewing group."[70] Family members in India continue to watch television together and constitute the audience in the domestic context.[71] In other words, viewing is not a

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[67] Some scholars like Denzin do not even consider the possibility of interviewing known persons. For him, "interview is a peculiar type of human interaction because it represents the coming together of two persons who are strangers." Denzin. *The Research Act in Sociology*. p. 142. See also, Spradley. *The Ethnographic Interview*. p. 28

[68] Seidman. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. p. 36

[69] Knut Lundby. 1998. *Longing and Belonging: Media and the Identity of Anglicans in a Zimbabwean Growth Point*. Report Series- 34. Oslo: Dept. of Media and Communication, University of Oslo. p. 45

[70] James Lull. 1988. "The Family and Television in World Cultures". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 9

[71] This does not mean that 'family' is a single, homogenous consuming unit. As I shall discuss in the following chapters, there are generational and gender distinctions in the reception of television, making it a potential site for conflict.

solitary affair but collective and interactive. Interviewing the families as a group has not only resembled this practice of collective viewing but also produced their accounts of television viewing interactively.[72] The interaction among the participants during the interview has produced data which otherwise would have been nearly impossible.[73]

Conducting the interviews in the respective homes had some other advantages too. Firstly, the presence of the television set triggered some memories in many houses which would have been missed had the interview been held somewhere else. Secondly, it ensured maximum attendance in the interview. Otherwise, assembling all the members, especially the old and the very young ones, would have been difficult. Thirdly and most importantly, to a certain extent the conduct of the interview in the homes balanced the asymmetry or the unequal power relationship within the interview situation discussed above. My 'superiority' in view of my researcher status and my priesthood was balanced by my vulnerability in being a guest in the participants' homes.

However, conducting interviews in the viewing context had its share of interruptions. These were the normal distractions that happen in a house. In two families, small babes started crying and their mothers had to excuse themselves for some time. In another house two neighbours appeared unexpectedly and the casualty was the absence of the housewife for a significant part of the interview. There were other constraints like the telephone calls or lack of physical space, but these were manageable when compared with the social visit of neighbours.

3.2.2.4 Research interview

The time for the interview was fixed mainly through personal face to face communication except in three cases of using the telephone. At the agreed time I went to the houses on my own or with the contact person. On reaching each house the contact person exchanged a few pleasantries with the family and left. Once he

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[72] Interviewing the family has taken shades of group or focus group interview. However I do not enter into a debate on the differences between group, focus group and focussed interviews. For relevant literature see the various articles in Nigel Fielding, ed. 2003. *Interviewing*. I. London: Sage. See specially, E. S. Bogardus. "The Group Interview", Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall. "The Focused Interview" and Robert K. Merton. "The Focussed Interview and Focus Groups: Continuities and Discontinuities". [For an explanation of the difference in the spelling of focussed/focused in the above titles, see Merton. "The Focussed Interview and Focus Groups". p. 269]

[73] David L. Morgan. 1988. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 12

left, I chatted with the family members for some time. The family, in turn, was given the opportunity to ask questions about my whereabouts, the parishes I served and the research work I am engaged in. These introductions were helpful to establish rapport and mutual acceptance.[74] After these preliminaries I talked about my research, saying:

> As you have been told I am a student at the University of Edinburgh doing research on television and religion. My special focus is how television is used in the everyday life. I am happy that you are willing to participate in this interview which will last about one to one and a half hours. There are no right or wrong answers as it is your life that you are talking about. So please talk freely and openly. Also feel free to ask me if you need any clarification or repetition. If it is okay shall we then proceed with the interview?

The family members expressed their assent and agreed to come and sit near where I was sitting. I assured them that their name or house name would not be revealed in my thesis and they should not feel hesitant in expressing their perceptions of television. Permission was also sought to record the interview on audiotape to use it for analysis and presentation

This preliminary organisation took a few minutes. In one house the daughter-in-law was hesitant to sit alongside her father-in-law and needed some persuasion to oblige. In some houses there were not enough chairs or space for everybody to sit around the audiocassette recorder: I thus requested them to bring a mat and we all sat on the floor. Sitting on the floor with the participants was helpful in overcoming the hierarchical family structure in seating and to reduce the physical and social distance between the participants and myself.

While everybody was settling down, I took notes about the material context of the living room and the names of the family members. Writing down the names was useful in addressing them correctly during the interview. Once the interview began I stopped writing in order to listen effectively and maintain eye contact with them.[75]

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[74] For some of the factors that contribute to building rapport, see Barry Glassner and Julia Loughlin. 1987. *Drugs in Adolescent Worlds: Burnouts to Straights*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. p. 35, Valerie Raleigh Yow. 1994. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. pp. 60–64

[75] Edwards. *Interviewing*. p. 10

The tape recorder released me "from the role of stenographer,"[76] so that I could listen more attentively to the conversation and respond to it. The tape recorder also proved useful in some houses where either the visibility was poor because of low power input or the interview had to be conducted with kerosene lamps during a power cut. However, precautions had to be taken for tape recording. Before and during the interview I had to make sure that the recorder and the batteries were functioning.[77] I also carried a spare recorder with me. During the interview many of the participants had to be asked to speak louder as they forgot, fortunately, the presence of the tape recorder once the interview had begun. Having the tape recorder also meant bearing the heat in some houses since it was feared that the sound of the electric fan would drown the taped conversation, hence it could not be put on. Besides such physical matters, I had to plan to identify voices at the transcription stage. Since there were four or five participants in each interview I followed two methods of marking each voice. Firstly, when the introductions were made I requested each participant to give his or her name and demographic details like education or job. Secondly, during the interview I addressed the participants by their names to fix the voice with the names. The mentioning of names in between the interview was in contradiction to the assurance of anonymity given to them in the beginning, so I decided to transcribe the tapes myself.[78]

Each interview lasted from one to one-and-a-half hours. I had with me an "interview guide,"[79] which is a menu of broad themes and a list of areas to be discussed progressing from one to another. Within this framework of themes I allowed the interview to follow its own course most of the time. The wording of questions varied, and the questions were framed usually from the comments and opinions expressed. Without mechanically following questions or sequences, the themes were followed nevertheless more or less in the same way. The participants, besides talking to me,

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[76] Thomas R. Lindlof. 1995. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 185. See also, Rue Bucher, Charles E. Fritz and E. L. Quarantelli. 2003. "Tape Recorded Interviews in Social Research". In *Interviewing*, III. ed. Nigel Fielding. London: Sage. pp. 4–5

[77] For some of the technical details to be considered in audio recording, see Yow. *Recording Oral History*. pp. 50–52

[78] Daphne Keats M. 2000. *Interviewing: A Practical Guide for Students and Professionals*. Buckingham: Open University. p. 30

[79] Yow. *Recording Oral History*. p. 36, Raymond L. Gorden. 1975. *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques and Tactics*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey. pp. 264–65.

were encouraged to talk among themselves, to complement each other and at times even to contradict one another. This was possible mainly because the interview was conducted in the vernacular Malayalam.

In each house, one or two of the members emerged as the chief spokespersons depending on their ability in articulation and interest in watching television. However, it was interesting to note that the traditional hierarchy in the family structure did not control the conversation. In some houses it was the granddaughter who emerged as the most talkative person while in some others it was the grandmother. Though such varied articulation was expected, I took care to bring in other voices. To facilitate wider participation, members who were not forthcoming were asked specific questions or requested to comment on what another participant had said. For this I had to perform the role of a moderator as well as being an interviewer.[80]

3.2.3 Transcription of the interview material

As mentioned earlier, the audiotapes were played back after each interview to make sure that everything was recorded. However transcription or "the contextualisation of speech,"[81] was done only on my return from India. In order to protect their identity, as promised, pseudonyms are given to each family and its members taking into consideration their ethnic, religious and generational backgrounds.

Transcribing was done using a transcribing machine with a foot pedal and earphones, and was done verbatim as a whole on paper. Indicators like tape side and metre reading were put in the margins so that parts of the tapes could be played back if necessary. Digressions were omitted while other transcribing conventions such as hesitation and pauses or silence were noted. However the entire 480 A4 pages of Malayalam transcripts were not translated into English to avoid repetition of the laborious work. Only the sections of text selected for the purpose of presentation were translated.

Transcription was time consuming but beneficial in many ways. Besides protecting the identity of the participants, I had another chance to listen to the entire interviews

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[80] For a discussion on the role of moderator, see Morgan. "Focus Groups". pp. 337–338

[81] Elliot G. Mishler. 2003. "Representing Discourse: The Rhetoric of Transcription". In *Interviewing*, III. ed. Fielding. p. 14

and to develop "theoretical sensitivity,"[82] which is the ability to recognise what is important in the data and to give it meaning.

As all participants were guided to converse on the same themes the answers to key questions could be categorised and analysed. These are thematically analysed and presented in the following chapters.

3.2.4 Role of the researcher

It has already been indicated that in this study the role of the researcher is equally important to that of the interview participants. The researcher influences the outcome with his or her approach and presentation, the ability to build trust and rapport, and the way in which he/she adapts to the interview situation, coping with surprises and disappointments.[83]

It is important to acknowledge that, in the same way as the interview participants bring their varied roles to the interview, so does the researcher. One of the things to do to make the interview method more open, as James Scheurich suggests, is "to highlight the baggage the researcher brings to the interpretive moment."[84] This is also part of ethnographic ethics. As David Altheide suggests, "A key part of the ethnographic ethic is how we account for ourselves. Good ethnographies show the hand of the ethnographer. The effort may not always be successful, but there should be clear tracks that the attempt has been made."[85]

The varied roles that I brought to the interview had their advantages and disadvantages. As a 'native' I had privileged access to the people and comprehension of the culture "from the inside."[86] As a fellow *Malayalee*, my social and cultural closeness with them should have offered them guarantees against the threat of having their subjective reasoning reduced to objective causes.[87] This acquaintance, as Grant McCracken argues, "gives the investigator a fitness of touch and delicacy of insight

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[82] Anslem Strauss and Juliet Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Technique*. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 46

[83] Cf. David L. Altheide. 1996. *Qualitative Media Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 80

[84] Scheurich. *Research Method in the Postmodern*. p. 74

[85] Altheide. *Qualitative Media Analysis*. p. 79

[86] Eduardo Neiva. 2001. "Rethinking the Foundations of Culture". In *Culture in the Communication Age*, ed. James Lull. London: Routledge. p. 33

[87] Pierre Bourdieu. 1996. "Understanding in Theory". *Culture and Society* 13, no. 2. p. 21

that few ethnographers working in other cultures can hope to develop."[88] This is, indeed, a great advantage.

Besides being a native, my religious role as an ordained minister (*atchan*) was also helpful in the research process. The devotion of Marthoma Christians to their *atchan* is well known. This devotion, however, is based on mutual trust, a significant religio-cultural legacy of the church. This means that interview participants will draw their priests into their confidence—to the point that they will tell him things which they would not easily divulge to anybody else.

Being an *atchan* I enjoyed instant access and apparent trust from the participants.[89] For instance, women in the households were willing to sit and participate in the interviews even in the absence of their husbands or other male members in the house. The hope of getting a sympathetic ear from a pastor may have prompted some of them to share their problems with me during the interviews. For instance, one housewife suggested that television is affecting her son's studies and asked me to pray specifically on this issue. Again, I was pleasantly surprised when they shared some of their stories which I would not have expected them to recount had I been their parish priest. Open and uninhibited comments from the interview participants on sensitive issues like family prayer gave me confidence in conducting the interviews.

This does not mean that my religious role as an *atchan* has not brought any disadvantages. There seems to be a common contention that priests, and perhaps ministers of religion in general, are likely to be an obstacle to objective research. The reason for this is supposed to be their social standing, particularly among the priest's own church members. People's respect for their priests is such that they would tend to say to a priest what he would like to hear. There is some truth in this contention.

Though I did not wear my cassock to any of the houses, my ministerial role was not forgotten by any of the Marthoma families. They continued to address me as *atchan* throughout the interview. Again, while I was leaving after the conclusion of the interview, all the members in these houses stood expecting me to offer a word of prayer as is the customary conclusion of a pastoral visit. I obliged. However, I did

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[88] McCracken. *The Long Interview*. p. 32

[89] Cf. Fred C. Craddock. 1985. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. p. 23

not pray with non-Marthomite families, except when one made a specific request for prayer. This does show that the families were aware and conscious of the fact that they were speaking to an authority figure in the community asking questions about their everyday life and religious practices.

I could detect that some of them tried to give answers that, in their opinion, would please me. One or two participants in fact said, "*Atchan*, we said many things not knowing whether those were useful to you."[90] I then reiterated my initial comment that it is their story and there is nothing right or wrong about it. I also noticed efforts on the part of some adults to present a picture of a non-complaining and conflict-free television viewing family.

My ministerial role may have had significant influence on what some families said on their practice of watching television especially on Sunday mornings. As I shall suggest in the following chapters there were instances when the concerned family members felt it necessary to explain why they happened to be at home on a Sunday morning rather than in the Church. One interview participant's suggestion of feeling guilty for watching television on a Sunday morning is a case in point.

As with the interview participants, my identity as a pastor had its influence on my conduct of the interview as well. I felt discomfort in asking for further information on issues like watching scenes with sexual connotations. As I shall mention later, talking about sex or related issues in public is difficult in Kerala, especially in the presence of family members, and that too by a pastor. Perhaps both the researcher and the participants would have been able to talk more on these issues if the researcher had not been a pastor.

In short, for me being an *atchan* had its advantages and its disadvantages during the field research. Being aware of the problems, I tried to minimise my social distance, mainly in two ways. Firstly, in some of the families I shared from my experiences as a television viewer especially when women did not want to contradict their husbands in front of me or when the children were hesitant to talk about quarrels over the remote-control. Relating some of the problems about the remote control from my own house immediately brought a further opening up and showed that a controlled and appropriate sharing on the part of the researcher can make the interview a much

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[90] This also could have been the result of the apprehension/uncertainty in research interviews. Cf. Spradley. *The Ethnographic Interview*. p. 79

more reciprocal conversation.[91] Secondly, in some houses I sat on the floor with the interview participants rather than choosing to sit on the available chair. Even with these conscious efforts to minimise the status difference, it needs to be emphasised that the interview data is generated by a researcher who happens to be a priest.

Towards the end of the interview I debriefed the participants just as they had been briefed in the beginning. The debriefing consisted of thanking the participants and asking for their comments or questions regarding the interview. The time was also used to accept their hospitality in the form of tea and snacks.

As a researcher, I was aware of some of the possibilities and problems of the interview method even before the start of the fieldwork. However, as each human encounter can bring its own surprises and challenges, conducting the interviews proved to be influential or rather formative for me as a researcher. The whole process threw up challenges and opportunities for me to reflect self-critically on my practices as a researcher, as a religious professional and also as a fellow Marthomite.

The effort in this section so far has been to describe the research processes and my role as a researcher in the process. In the next section I turn to the research participants.

3.3 Profile of participant families

In this section I introduce the families who took part in the research interviews. A general appraisal of the participants is given before each family is presented. The family profile gives the socio-economic and educational background of the family members, their participation in the interview and the physical setting for television viewing. The description of the material context of television, however, is limited to the living room and its decorations since I did not seek entry to other parts of the house. As promised to them each family is given a name and the members are introduced in their relationship to each other in the family rather than following the

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[91] There is no unanimity among researchers on such sharing. For example, Berger argues against sharing whereas Oakley takes a diametrically opposite position. Lindlof, like me, takes an inclusive position. Berger. *Media Research Techniques*. p. 61, Oakley. "Interviewing Women", Lindlof. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. p. 182

patriarchal pattern of describing their relationship to the male member (head) of the house.[92]

Two to six members were present in each house making a total of 88 participants including five children under the age of ten. Women constituted a majority of participants, because they were at home and available unlike their male counterparts. The interview participants were of various life-stages and spanned three generations. They varied in age, health and financial resources. Their educational level was also varied from being functional literate to postgraduates. However, reflecting the high literacy rate in Kerala, there was only one illiterate among the participants.

1. **Anjilivelil**

Anjilivelil Abraham and his wife Kunjamma are a working class couple in their early forties. Abraham works in a saw mill and Kunjamma in a shop. Both their children Soji and Biju are studying in high school. Soji is thirteen and Biju is eleven years old. They live near to the family home (called *Kudumbam* in Malayalam), where Abraham's mother Aleyamma stays with her younger son and family. Aleyamma takes care of the children until Kunjamma arrives home from work.

They live in a one bedroom house. In addition to the bedroom they have a small front hall, or veranda, and a kitchen. The roof is tiled and the floor is cement. The veranda is very small and is packed with durables. A dining table and six wooden chairs occupy the major part of one corner. In addition, four plastic wired steel chairs and a teapoy are put alongside the main wall.

They have a second-hand television set, bought two years ago, which is kept on an old table alongside the dining table leaving no space in between. This placement enables viewing from both the veranda and the bedroom. In this home the television set is shifted between two places during the year. In 'normal' time it is kept on the table, but during 'exam time' it is put on a cement shelf specially fitted to the wall about six feet from the floor. This is to restrict the children from watching too much television during the exam period.[93] The walls are yet to be plastered and there are no decorations, images or photographs either on the wall or anywhere else in the room.

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[92] This does not mean, as I shall show in the following chapters, that patriarchy is absent in watching television.

[93] I shall discuss the interaction between television and children's studies in Chapters Five and Six.

Aleyamma was present when I visited them and she took part in the interview as well. It was, however, Soji and her father who emerged as the main speakers with occasional comments from the other two women and the young boy.

2. **Arackal**

The Arackal family consists of a young couple, Babu and Beena, and their two children Anju and Aswin. As in the case of the Anjilivelils, they live near to the *Kudumbam* where his father Thomas, brother and family live.

Babu has been working for ten years as a technician in a local factory and thus was able to build a three bedroom concrete roof house with a tiled floor. The living room of this 'modern type' house is used both for living and dining purposes. The living area has a wooden sofa, five chairs and a teapoy. The other half contains a dining table and chairs. Household durables include a new multinational brand fridge kept in the dining area.

They have a colour television, bought seven years ago, and kept in a glass covered television stand. It is near the main entrance door of the house so that it can be viewed either by sitting on the sofa or at the dining table. Placed alongside the television stand is a music system and deck on a small table.

The decorations in the room include door and window curtains. The colour-washed wall is covered with various images of Jesus, including his crucifixion and prayer in Gethsemane. Some of these images have inscriptions in Malayalam and English such as, "I Thirst." Besides such images, Bible verses in Malayalam for example Joshua 24:15 painted on a metal sheet are hanging on the wall. Interestingly, there were two crucifixes in the room, one of which was on top of the television stand.[94]

Babu has a strong political affiliation to the Marxist-led Left Democratic Front, as was disclosed during the interview.[95] His father Thomas was present during the interview, making Beena hesitant to sit besides him. Even though Beena agreed to my request to sit with us, she was hesitant to express herself especially when she did not agree with her husband. Since their children were only six and four years old, I did not ask them many questions.

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[94] The Marthoma Church does not use a crucifix in worship or church buildings.

[95] Its implications on his television viewing and channel selection will be discussed in Chapter Five.

3. **Charuvil**

The Charuvil family is one of the two shop owners participated in this study, having a stationery store as part of their house. Both Chacko and his wife Ponnamma, in their fifties, take turns at the store. Two of their sons are working outside Kerala whereas the eldest, Moncy, is at home after a brief stint at Chennai. Moncy is professionally qualified with a Radio and TV mechanical diploma. His parents had studied to tenth standard.

They live in a small two-storied building with concrete roofing. The front room, which connects the residential area to the store, is small and serves both as living and dining room. Two wooden sofa settees, two single chairs and a teapoy are placed in one half of the room while dining table and four chairs occupy the other half. Another table, a revolving chair and an *almarah* (a cupboard) are also kept in this room, leaving no empty space.

They have a colour television set, bought seven years ago, which is kept on a television stand. The stand has three shelves. The lowest contains five copies of the Bible, *Christiya Keerthanangal*[96] and Maramon Convention songbooks.[97] The middle shelf is devoted to audiocassettes and the top is for the television set. A Stabiliser, which is a necessity in Kerala for any electrical appliances due to the erratic power flow, is placed on top of the stand. Kept beside it are talcum powder and other cosmetics. As the television is placed alongside the dining table only those sitting on one side can watch it while eating.

The walls are full of calendars, post-card sized photographs and posters of Jesus. Prominent among them are a reproduction of Leonardo Vinci's 'Last Supper' and an image of a fair and long-haired, praying Jesus.

When I reached this house at the fixed time Chacko was having lunch watching a film. Since it was lunch break all three of the family could participate in the interview. All of them were very active participants.

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[96] This is a publication of the Marthoma Church containing both the Sunday liturgy and Christian hymns.

[97] This is a publication of the Marthoma Church in conjunction with the Maramon Convention.

4. **Chekkulath**

Chechamma, who likes detective stories, is the widow of a policeman of the Chekkulath family. She is in her late sixties and lives with her younger daughter Sali and family. Her two other daughters are married and work in Kuwait. Like Arackal Babu, Sali's husband Christi works in a factory. Christi was adopted (*Dathedukkuka*) by the Chekkulath family since they have no sons. Sali has a four-year-old son. While Chechamma has the old seventh standard education, which in her day was something remarkable, Sali and Christi have studied up to Pre-degree.

The house was built thirty-four years ago and shows its age. The veranda is an asbestos roofed extension to the main block of two rooms and runs the length of the house. The floor is cement. There are four cane chairs, four plastic chairs and a teapoy in the veranda. They have a colour television set, bought six years ago, and a videocassette recorder. Both are kept in one corner on a small stand with two shelves. The shelf on the wall contains Bibles and songbooks. Except for a framed image of Jesus facing the entrance door there are no decorations on the wall.

This is the only house where there were only two participants in the interview. Chechamma is asthmatic and had trouble talking at the beginning but then became interested and emerged as the chief spokesperson.

5. **Edayilyath**

Unlike the Chekkulath family, the Edayilyaths have three generations in the home. Deenamma is a seventy-four-year-old and lives with her daughter-in-law Susamma and her three children. Susamma's husband is working in North India. Deenamma has studied up to seventh standard whereas Susamma completed SSLC.[98] Of Susamma's children, Ashok, the elder son, has completed his tenth standard while his brother Abhilash is in ninth. Aswati, the youngest daughter, is in the seventh standard.

Their house has a main block of three rooms and two extensions to make a kitchen and a veranda. The main block has a tiled roof, whereas the extensions have slanted asbestos roofing. The floor is cement but cracked here and there. One wall hanging of the painting of 'The Last Supper', a photograph of the three children and two calendars constitute the decorations on the wall. One of the calendars is the 'secular'

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[98] Secondary School Leaving Certificate refers to tenth standard.

Malayala Manorama and the other an 'ecclesial' *Yuvadeepam*. The latter is a publication of the Marthoma Yuvajana Sakhyam, the youth wing of the Marthoma Church.

This was one of the two houses in this study, where the colour television set, bought three years ago on an instalment basis, was kept in the bedroom. This was also one of the houses where we sat on the floor for the interview. When I reached the house the boys were playing cricket on the country road. They stopped to accompany me and participate in the interview. However their sister could not participate because she was visiting her maternal home during the summer holidays. It was only Abhilash who needed occasional prompting to speak in an otherwise very active conversation. Towards the end of the interview, Deenamma's younger son, who lives nearby, came but remained as a spectator rather than a participant.

6. **Inchakkalayil**

Inchakkalayil is a joint family. Elikkutty, her son Thankachan and his family, another son's wife and child, live together in an old house. Elikkutty is about seventy-five years old. Thankachan, who holds a diploma from polytechnic, worked in the Middle East for a few years before losing his job. Presently he is looking after an agricultural and rubber plantation. His wife Bini is a postgraduate and they have two children, a seven-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son. Pushpa, the other resident, is one of the two participants in the research sample who was born and brought up outside Kerala. Her husband is working in Mumbai.

Their house is an old type house with three small rooms constituting the main block with a veranda running the length of the house. The narrow veranda has wooden grills and the roof is tiled. One side of the veranda is the living area and the other side is for dining. A wooden settee and three chairs are kept along the wall facing the grills. There are no decorations on the wall. The colour television set, bought seven years ago, is kept at the end of the living area of the veranda on a small table.

Here also we sat on a mat for the interview. During the interview a power cut twice forced us to continue the interview with a kerosene lamp. Pushpa's baby started crying during the interview and was taken inside for feeding. While the three women talked freely, Thankachan needed specific questions to prompt him to speak.

7. **Karivedakath**

Karivedakath Joyamma is seventy years of age, lives with her daughter-in-law Sheeba, and two grandsons, Titu and Binu. The boys are ten and nine years old and are primary school pupils. Sheeba, like Inchakkalayil Pushpa, is a *Malayalee* brought up outside Kerala. Sheeba's husband was at home for about a year and a half due to redundancy in the Middle East and had just returned there to seek a job.

They have a typical *gulf-man's house*. It is a two-storied four bedroom building with concrete roof. The floor is mosaic and the walls are colour-washed. The house and the property are fenced in with a compound wall and an iron gate. The main door leads to a big hall demarcated into living and dining areas with a curtain. The living area has a sofa settee, three single settees, one sofa-cum-bed and four plastic chairs. A showcase on the wall has artefacts and toys and two images of Jesus; one of the crucifixion and the other of the Last Supper. On the wall an image of the Madonna and Child is kept, which was attributed to Sheeba's Jacobite background. Other decorations on the wall include a poster with the picture of paten, chalice with the inscription, 'I am the living bread.' Another wall hanging featured the Bible verse, Psalm 48:14 in Malayalam.

The colour television set, bought seven years ago, is kept in the living room but facing the dining table so that the boys can view it while having their meals. Unlike in other houses the small boys were the main spokespersons along with their grand-mother. After the interview, when we were having tea, Sheeba shared her problem of bringing up the children and asked me to pray. They also presented me with a blank audiocassette which Sheeba's husband had brought from the Gulf.

8. **Kottarathil**

Kottarathil is another family, which has the breadwinner, Thomas, in the Middle East. However, unlike Karivedakath, they do not have a *gulf-man's house*. Before leaving for the Middle East six years ago, Thomas was running a teashop near the junction. Presently, Thomas' mother Kunjumol, who is in her mid-seventies, lives with Thomas' wife Rosamma and their three children, in an old house. Of the three children, Vinay has finished his Pre-degree and is doing a computer course. His sister Savita is in twelfth and Anita is in eighth standard. Since Savita had a special class during the summer, only Anita could take part in the interview along with her mother and grandmother.

Their house structure has the same pattern as the Edayilyath family. The main block with tiled roof has three rooms with an asbestos roofed extension. The extension functions as veranda and the floor is cement. A wooden sofa and chairs are put on both sides of the long veranda. The colour television set, bought seven years ago, is placed at a corner to be viewed from both sides. As in the Charuvil house, the television set is kept on a television stand. On top of the stand there are an 'imported' plastic flower vase and some plastic flowers from the Gulf. The television set is placed on the upper shelf. The lower shelf is devoted to Christian books. Neatly kept in the shelf were five copies of the Bible, six *Christiya Keerthanangal* and four Maramon Convention songbooks. Near to the television is a teapoy with a telephone and a notepad on it.

There are many wall decorations. One of the framed images is that of the crucifixion. There is also a calendar issued by the Ranny-Nilackal Diocese of the Marthoma Church. It was published in connection with the *Christu Jayanthy* or Millennium year celebration. It is a large sized calendar with various images and inscriptions such as *Oruvan Christuvil Aayal Avan Puthiya Srishti Aakunnu* and *Kristhuvil Puthujeevan*.[99] The images include the crucifixion, the descending of the Holy Spirit as a dove and someone kneeling before Jesus.

I visited some of the other families twice, once to arrange for the interview and again for conducting it. However, I had to visit this family thrice. The first visitation was part of the selection process. As agreed I went there again the following morning hoping that the sole male member would be home from visiting his maternal uncle. Since he had not returned we postponed the interview for another day. Even though he agreed over the telephone about the time of the interview, his uncle changed his travel plans and so I missed him even on my third visit. As a result the interview was conducted without his participation.

During the interview two women came from the neighbourhood causing Kunjumol and then Rosamma to leave for some time. After a while Kunjumol excused herself, mentioning her inability to sit for a long time. Rosamma and Anita were the main speakers in the interview.

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[99] Means, 'one who is in Christ is a new creation'.

9. **Kuzhivila**

Kuzhivila is one of the Dalit Marthoma families. This family consists of Ponnachan, his wife Lilly and their three daughters. Lilly, who can manage to read and write, is in her forties. Linu studies in ninth standard, Ginu in eighth and Rinu in seventh. Ponnachan was working in a country liquor shop[100] as a supplier until he was made redundant due to a change in Government policy. At present he earns his livelihood by working in a shop on a daily wage basis from early morning until late at night.

They live in a small house among the thatched mud huts in their neighbourhood. It was built seven years ago and has a veranda, one bedroom, a dining room and a kitchen. It has a tiled roof and cement floor. However, much work remains to be done on the doors, windows and furnishings.

This family has a second-hand black and white television set bought three years ago. It is kept on a table near the entrance door. Earlier it was placed on the other side of the room facing the entrance door and chairs were kept facing the television set. However, in a thunderstorm the electric socket was burnt so the television set had to be shifted to the present position and seating rearranged accordingly. Near the television set is kept an old tape recorder-cum-radio on a teapoy. The wall was unplastered and there were no decorations or images on the wall or anywhere else in the room.

This is one of the houses where many from the neighbourhood would come and watch television. When I arrived at the house people had just finished watching an afternoon serial. Since Ponnachan was working, only Lilly and the three daughters participated in the interview. Ponnachan's mother, though present in the house, could not take part because she was not well at that time.

10. **Mullumkuzhy**

Mullumkuzhy is another Dalit Marthoma family with the distinction of twins among its members. Mariamma, in her late seventies, lives with her son Baby, his wife Mini and their three daughters. The twins Mercy and Mincy have finished their twelfth standard in first class, which their sister Merin has just started.

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[100] It is called *Kallushaap* where toddy or *kallu* is sold.

Baby is a plumber and the only earning member of the family, because Mariamma can no longer work as a manual labourer. Like the Kuzhivilas, this family also is in the process of building a house. It is a comparatively big structure with concrete roof. The walls are still to be plastered, floor cemented and interior furnishings done. In the front room there is a dining table with four plastic chairs and two stools, which we used for the interview.

They had had a second-hand black and white television set bought six years ago which they had used for about three years. At the time of the interview they had a second-hand colour television. It is kept on an old wooden table of which the partly broken drawers remain open. There are no decorations on the wall presumably because of the incomplete work. Since Baby works from morning until late at night only the five women of the house could attend the interview. Even though there was a sixth, Mini's mother, she did not participate, stating that she was only a visitor. Distinguishing the twins and addressing them correctly was difficult to begin with. This was resolved by finding that the one who sat nearer to me was Mercy.

11. **Muruppel**

Muruppel is a Dalit family which took membership of the Marthoma Church only recently. Like Charuvil, they also run a shop. Ninan, an ex-serviceman, started a *thattukada*[101] near the city junction after his retirement from the army. He lives with his wife and their son Sam and family. Sam is a manual labourer working with building contractors. Besides them two other granddaughters, Dolly and Molly, and a grandson Suraj, were present at the interview. Dolly, who is married with a child, has the distinction among the participants of having received a television set from her grandmother as a wedding present. Except for Molly who is an undergraduate student, no one else in the family had studied beyond primary school.

The Muruppels live in a newly built two-room house in a slum area. Since there was neither much space in the veranda nor enough chairs, we sat on a mat in one of the rooms for the interview. The television set, bought from a second-hand shop about two years ago, was kept in a corner of this room on a small table. Here again we had to use kerosene lamps because power was cut twice during the interview.

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[101] *Thattukada* is a popular mobile teashop in small towns and cities. It is brought to the junctions or pavements during the evenings and is open throughout the night.

If Arackal Babu disclosed his political allegiance, the Muruppels had no need to declare theirs. Their veranda was full of images of past and present leaders of the Indian National Congress party. However the space was not the exclusive domain of political leaders, there were an equal number of religious images. The religious images and icons included that of the Last Supper and the crucifixion. The walls were also decorated with Bible verses, for example Acts 6:31, *Karthavaya yesuvil viswasikka, ennal neeyum ninte kudumbavum raksha prapikkum.*

Unlike the women of other houses Ninan's wife could not participate in the interview because she was at the shop. Dolly, Suraj and their grandfather were the main talkers among the six participants in this family.

12. **Neduvellil**

Neduvellil is one of the upper-middle class families among the participants. Oommen, his wife Susamma and their daughter Shaila live in a two-storied concrete roof house with a compound wall and iron-gate. Susamma's father and niece Jaya also live with them.

Oommen is a retired government official and Susamma, a housewife. Shaila is pursuing postgraduate studies in a nearby college and lives with her parents. Jaya's parents are in Kuwait. She stays at Neduvellil for the sake of her studies in a respected English medium school. Until recently Susamma's sister Molly and her family were also staying with them after returning from Africa.

Their living room is meticulously planned and neatly kept. As in some other houses in this study it is a large hall with the second half being used as the dining area. The place for the television set was considered in the building plan itself. They bought the set about twenty years ago from Oommen's sister, who in turn brought it from the Gulf. It is kept near to the staircase so that it can be viewed both from the living room area and the dining table. A modern sofa settee and single settees occupy the living room along with one flower pot and a potted plant. The wall is colour-washed and there are no images except one of Jesus on the wall.

Besides the members of the family, Molly and her daughter Shobha were also present at the interview. The only member who could not participate was Susamma's father because of poor health.

13. **Niravath**

Philip and his wife Suma are in their mid-forties and live with their three children Soni, Sonu and Sunu. The children attend a respected English medium high school. Philip has a diploma in radio mechanics and his wife has a degree. Philip and family were in the Middle East for ten years, came home permanently as a result of the Gulf war, and started a construction business. They live in a very big two storied building in a compound with other buildings of their own which are let out for offices and shops.

The drawing room reveals the hand of an interior decorator. The floor is laid out with marble stones and carpets, sofa settees and single settees are luxurious; the wall painting co-ordinates with other decorations in the room. There are not many images on display except a painting of a landscape. The drawing room also has a telephone receiver and a mobile phone. This is the only house where there was a computer for the use of the children. More importantly they have a separate room for viewing television.

They brought the television set that they have been using in Kuwait. However a year ago, it broke down so they bought a new colour television set which is kept in a separate room. The children were the most active participants in the interview with complementing comments from the parents.

14. **Ottaplackal**

Apart from Anjilivelil family, Ottaplackal was the only other working couple among the Marthoma families. However unlike the former, this couple are highly placed professionals. Renjan is a college professor. His wife Neena is working in another town as an executive in a government firm. Their two daughters Nitty and Nimmy, like the children of Niravath, study in a prominent English medium high school in the city. Nitty is in eleventh and Nimmy in ninth standard.

The Renjans moved to their present place because of his job. They bought a plot and built a two storied house. Within the same compound another building is nearing completion and will be let out. Theirs is a densely populated town and rental property is easy to let. Their drawing room is furnished with expensive sofas and settees. There are not many images or decorations on the wall or in the room.

They bought a black and white 14 inch television set about ten years ago and used it for about three years. It was then replaced with a 21inch colour television. Like the Niravaths, this family also have a special place for watching television. They have demarcated the balcony for television and its viewing.

The children were the most active participants with occasional comments from Ranjan. Neena cited her lack of interest in television and excused herself from the interview.

15. **Oonnukallil**

Oonnukallil is unique in having four television sets in the house, the oldest being bought twenty years ago. However, they are put together in one corner of the long veranda rather than in different places. Two of them are in working condition, while the third needs to be adapted because it was brought from the United States.

Oonnukallil has a typical old house (*arayum nirayum*) signifying their prominence a generation ago.[102] This house which has a tiled roof and cement floor is built in a big plot with a plantation and fruit trees.

It is a joint family led by Samuel, a retired physical education professor in a city college. He and his wife Mary are in their eighties; they were the oldest among the interview participants. They live with one of their sons, Tom, and his wife Nirmala and their children Sherin and Bevin. Tom and family spent some years in South Africa and on their return he started a business while Nirmala obtained a job as a teacher. Sherin is an undergraduate student and her brother Bevin is in tenth standard.

Except for a framed image of Jesus there are no decorations on the wall. Since Tom comes home very late he could not participate in the interview. It was the grandparents and the grandchildren who were active in the interview.

16. **Punnooreth**

The Punnooreth family, like Muruppel, lives in a colony on the outskirts of the city. They are Hindus belonging to Dalit background. Sarasamma, a widow in her early sixties lives with Ammini, widow of her son Prabhakaran and four children. Lalitha,

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[102] The *arayum nirayum* is an in-built storage room made with wood for the purpose of storing grains from the field.

the eldest of the children, is a school drop-out because she has suffered from mental illness for sometime. The younger boys, Sooraj and Sanjay, are in eighth and fifth standard respectively while their elder brother stopped his studies when he failed the eighth standard.

Sarasamma was a manual labourer until poor health stopped her working. As a result Ammini is the main breadwinner of the house, working as a domestic servant in one of the wealthy houses in the locality. The boys do help by working as part-time gardeners in the same house where Ammini works. Sarasamma and Lalitha look after the household chores.

They live in a mud house with two rooms and a veranda. It has a slanted roof, one half of which is covered with a metal foil, while the other is thatched with coconut leaves. One has to duck to enter the veranda. It is very small and filled with a cot, two chairs and a stool. A table fan is kept on a stool. The floor is cement and we sat on a mat for the interview.

The side wall is set aside for worship with framed pictures of *Krishnan* and *Ayyappan*. A small wooden shelf is fixed to the wall just below the pictures to keep the *nilavilakku* and incense sticks. The main wall has posters of film and sports stars. A garlanded photograph of Prabhakaran, who committed suicide two years ago, adorns the central place above the main door.

This was the second house which had its television set in the bedroom. The black and white second-hand set was bought three years ago and has had to be repaired twice: it thus has become a worry and a financial concern.

All the family members participated in the interview. However Sarasamma's brother-in-law, who stays with them, came only at the very end of the interview and did not enter the house, as he was drunk and unable to walk or talk. At the end of the interview I obliged to their request to pray for them.

17. **Pulloli**

The Pullolis, the second Hindu family among the interview participants, is the only house where the participants were a 'generation apart,'— a couple and their grandson attended the interview. Thankappan, a farmer, lives with his wife Sreedevi and their daughter's son Gopu. Thankappan and Sreedevi are in their seventies and they have a

small rubber plantation and two cows. Gopu's father is working in the Middle East and his mother continues to work in North India.

They live in an old type house with two rooms with tiled roof and an asbestos roofed veranda. The furniture in the veranda includes a wooden sofa, two plastic chairs and a teapoy. One portion of the veranda is used for dining with a wooden table and a bench. Another portion towards the end is separated for worship (*pooja*) with the side wall covered with religious posters. Unlike in Punnooreth, these were bigger images and featured *Sree Narayana Guru, Saraswati, Ganapati,* and *Sabarimala Ayyappan.*[103] Like some other Hindus, this family has placed an image of Jesus, a calendar in fact, along with posters of their gods. Two *nilavilakku,* one of which was six-foot high, and incense stands are kept on each side of the images. The colour television set, brought from Mumbai six years ago is placed against the background of the god-posters and is kept in front of the *nilavilakku.*

Like any other farmer in his old age, Thankappan was bare-chested wearing only a *lungi* when I visited them. His brother and family live nearby, and his three sons and their families live in Mumbai. As with the Kuzhivilas, some of the neighbours come to this house to watch television, especially the films.

18. **Suvarna Nivas**

Unlike the other two Hindu families, this is a middle class home with a working couple amongst its members. Uthaman Nair and his wife Gouriamma are in their mid-seventies. They live with one of their daughters, Vijayamma and her family, while another daughter and family stay nearby. Uthaman Nair was in business until some years ago and presently looks after the land. Both Vijayamma and her husband Gopalan Nair are High school teachers in a nearby town. They have two daughters, Ramya, an undergraduate student, and Soumya who is in primary school.

They have a modern house with several rooms, a concrete roof, and colour-washed walls and mosaic floor. The main door leads to a sitting-cum-dining room where a dining table and six chairs are placed. On the wall, as in the other two Hindu homes, various framed pictures of gods and goddesses are kept along with *nilavilakku.* They have a separate *pooja* room like some upper-middle class families. The house also

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[103] Of these the first one was a religious reformer and the rest are gods/goddesses.

has the distinction of having more than one radio set besides a colour television. The television set, bought three years ago, is kept on a stand with a cloth cover.

This is the only house where the children were interviewed separately from the elders. When the time for the interview was fixed with Vijayamma on the previous day, she forgot about the classical music tuition of her daughters. By the time I had finished the interview with the elders and was having tea, the children returned and participated in an extended interview session.

19. **Thenguvila**

Thenguvila is one of the two Muslim families that participated in this study. Usman is a fruit vendor near a city junction. He is in his mid-fifties and his wife Miriam is in her forties. They have three children. The eldest daughter is married. Nabeesa, the second daughter stopped studying after ninth standard. The younger son who is in seventh standard was not present; he had gone to play in a nearby park.

The Thenguvila family lives in a dense housing colony occupied by the low-income group in the outskirts of the city. The small plot of land on which they built their house was government property sold at a subsidised rate. Like their neighbours they have a small house with thatched roof and mud walls. The walls are whitewashed and the floor is cement. However, the floor is cracked, needing re-plastering. The veranda has two rusted steel chairs and a table. A table fan is kept on one of the chairs. The second-hand black and white television set, bought seven years ago, had to be replaced with another one when the former developed problems in reception. The set is placed on a table in the middle of the veranda. There are not many decorations on the wall, except for a small frame with Quran verses near the main door and two calendars on the side wall. One of the calendars has an image of a mountain while the other depicts a two-storied house overlooking a stream.

The lack of chairs caused us to sit on a mat for the interview, which Miriam attended without wearing the Muslim headgear (*parda*) and sitting near me for the sake of tape recording. Though Usman studied only to seventh standard he can speak many languages because of his work at a city junction. Miriam is the only illiterate interview participant in this study: she had only studied up to second standard. But to her credit, she was an active participant whereas her daughter Nabeesa needed prompting with specific questions.

20. **Valiyaveettil**

Valiyaveettil was the only family in this study to have a dish antenna. This family consists of Waheeda, a widow in her mid-sixties, her son Noorudin and his family. Noorudin operates a taxi service with his own car, which he bought on his return from the Middle East. He was educated up to eighth standard while his wife Sainaba studied up to tenth. They have two children; Salofar is thirteen and his sister Safeena is ten.

Their house is similar to many others among our participants: a main block with tiled roof with two or three rooms, and an asbestos roofed veranda. However the floor is mosaic. Here again, the veranda performs the function of both living and dining area, separated by a curtain. The dining area has a table, chairs, a cupboard and a fridge. The colour television, bought three years ago, is kept alongside the dining table.

The wall facing the front door is adorned with wall hangings, plaques and framed posters, all with Arabic verses from the Quran, and prayers like *Allahu Akbar*. There is an engraved image of the interior of the *Medeena Mosque*. On the front door a metallic sticker proclaims *786 Bismilla Rahman Rahi*. All of these have been brought from the Middle East.

Unlike Miriam and Nabeesa of Thenguvila, the women of this house only made a token presence at the interview. The girl child also could participate only partly because she had to go to the mosque for religious education, leaving Noorudin and Salofar as the main participants.

3.4 Conclusion

My attempt in this chapter has been to describe the field research I conducted in Kerala by explaining the research processes and introducing the participants of the ethnographic interviews. I have tried to answer two questions of field research, namely, "what was done and how it was done."[104] It has been my contention that both the research processes and the participants are equally important in a reception study like the present one and hence have to be accounted for. Consequently, I have argued that qualitative methodology and ethnographic interview method was theoretically appropriate, practically sensible and culturally suitable for the present

[104] Berger. *Media Research Techniques*. p. 159

research on television viewing. The description of the conduct of the interviews and the family profiles situate the filed research or emphasise that they are grounded in a particular interactional context.

The visitation of the houses for conducting the interviews has made me more conscious of the ways in which different families have organised or decorated their domestic space. The family profiles have introduced the participants and the material context of television viewing. It has also shown that various religious groups use or refrain from using mass-produced visual images in the construction of religious identity in the domestic space. For instance, while Hindu families have prayer lamps set before the god-posters, Muslims do not have any religious images at all to represent the divine person. Marthomites do have images but not as a focus of worship as in the Hindu families. Whether such differences have any impact on their interaction with an audio-visual medium like television is one question that I could explore because of the advantage of interviewing families from three different religious traditions.

What remains is perhaps the most important question of field research: what is generated during the interviews? This is the core of Part II where I report and analyse the stories that were constructed during the interviews. While conducting the interviews and writing these chapters I could not help noticing certain commonality between much of the experiences of the participant families and that of myself. In that sense, what is analysed in the following chapters has resonances in my own life, even though I have not shared them explicitly.

Part II
Cultural and religious anthropology of television audiences in Kerala

Chapter Four
Introduction of Television into Marthoma Homes

4.1 Introduction

This is the first of the four chapters in Part II where the story of television in the Marthoma families is recounted and analysed. In this chapter I begin this story by attempting a "biography"[1] of television in the Marthoma homes. By situating television in the domestic media context[2] I shall then address, in the following chapters, issues of watching television and its interaction with the practices of everyday life.

I shall proceed in three sections in this chapter to locate television in the "mediascape"[3] of the Marthoma families. In the first section, I discuss the pre-television media practice of the families in this study. One of the characteristics of Marthomites in this period, i.e. before the arrival of television, is a wholehearted acceptance and use of newspaper and radio contrasted with an apparent avoidance of cinema. Thus this section would help us to understand the distinctive mediascape into which television entered and to compare it with media use after the purchase of a television set.

In the second section the focus is on the arrival of television into the Marthoma homes. I describe in this section various processes and reasons for which Marthomites bought a television set. I suggest that even though children were the impetus for buying television in many families the elders and adults were responsible

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[1] I adopt this term from Kopytoff who talks about "biography of things." Igor Kopytoff. 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process". In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 67

[2] For an attempt to place television and other media in the context of domestic technology, see various contributions in Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch, eds. 1992. *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. London: Routledge.

[3] I borrow this term from Appadurai who uses five 'scapes' as dimensions of global cultural flow. These are ethno-, techno-, finance, media-, and ideoscape. He uses mediascape to refer to both "the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information…and to the images of the world created by these media." Arjun Appadurai. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press. p. 35. For an application of these 'scapes' in media research, see Knut Lundby. 1998. *Longing and Belonging: Media and the Identity of Anglicans in a Zimbabwean Growth Point*. Report Series- 34. Oslo: Dept. of Media and Communication, University of Oslo. pp. 23–24. I use the term mediascape in a limited sense, to refer to the presence and use of media in the domestic context.

for the purchase in many other families. Among other reasons, I highlight the absence of religious sanction against television enabling Marthomites to buy a set which they managed to do with greater or less difficulty depending on their material capital.

In the third section, I analyse the media practice of the families after the introduction of television to mark the influence of television in the domestic media context. By showing how television is perceived to have reduced the use of newspaper, radio, and, audio and videocassette players on the one hand, and increased film viewing on the other, I suggest in this section that the entry of television has changed the media use of the Marthomites.

In this chapter I demonstrate two main features of the biography of television in the Marthoma households. Firstly, Marthomites welcome television to their homes despite their aversion to an audio-visual medium like film. Secondly, since the entry of television to their households they have started viewing films in an unprecedented way. Thus, the introduction of television, I argue, signifies a paradigm shift in the mediascape of the Marthoma families.

4.2 Media practice before television

One way to understand the significance of the television medium in the lives of the Marthomites is to compare their media use both before and after the purchase of a television set. Since I have discussed in Chapter Two, the attitude of Marthomites towards traditional media,[4] I focus here on the use of modern mass media like newspaper, radio and film.

4.2.1 Use of newspaper

Newspaper reading, aided by a high literacy rate and widespread circulation of newspapers, has been a prevalent media practice in Kerala. All but one of the fifteen Marthoma families in this study had been subscribers to and readers of newspapers for many years or even decades. Only one each of the Marthoma, Hindu and Muslim families had not been able to subscribe to a daily paper for lack of financial resources. But they too read newspapers courtesy of their neighbours or in public places like reading rooms and teashops. For instance, Abraham used to read a

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[4] 2.4.1

newspaper at a teashop while the rest of his family read it courtesy of their neighbour.[5]

From the interviews it became clear that most of the families had been subscribing to the same daily for years. They usually read only one daily and their preference was always for a vernacular newspaper. The use of television by the Marthomites, which I discuss in the next chapter, will show a similar commitment to the Malayalam language and loyalty to a preferred channel or programmes.

4.2.2 Use of radio and audiocassette player

Besides newspapers, most families used radio to a greater extent in their pre-television days. Nineteen of the twenty families in this study had a radio or radio-cum-audiocassette player at home.

Like newspapers and, as we shall see in the next section, television, the duration of the possession of a radio varies from house to house depending on whether family members had lived elsewhere and on their economic background. Those who were living outside Kerala like Kottarathil Kunjumol and her family and, upper-class families like the Oonnukallils were early purchasers of a radio set about five decades ago; the rest had owned one for about two decades.

Although all families have not shared Philip's "craze about listening to radio,"[6] they used radio mainly for listening to the news, especially the Malayalam regional news (*pradesika varthakal*), both in the mornings and evenings.[7] Besides news, some used to hear devotional (*bhakti ganangal*) and film songs (*chalachithra ganangal*) whereas some others remembered listening to radio drama once in a while.

Like Radio, the audiocassette player known popularly as 'tape recorder' was also used in the pre-television days. Many families acquired a radio-cum-audiocassette

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[5] Anjilivelil Family. *Interview*. 10-05-2001

[6] Niravath Family. *Interview*. 18-06-2001

[7] Malayalam broadcast began from a radio station in Chennai (then Madras) in 1939. The broadcast from Kerala began on March 12, 1943. For useful reference to the history and development of Malayalam radio broadcast, see *Fortieth Anniversary Commemorative Souvenir on AIR*. 1990. Thiruvananthapuram: Akashavani Recreation Club, T. S. Karthikeyan. 1993. Milestones in the 50 Years of Malayalam Broadcasting: A Historical Study About AIR, Thiruvananthapuram. Master of Communication and Journalism Thesis, University of Kerala, G. P. S Nair. 1974. *Radio Smaranakal* (Radio Memories). Kottayam: SPCS Ltd.

player and used it mainly to play cassettes of sermons, *kathakalakshepam*[8] and songs.

4.2.3 "Cinema is orgy"?

If the Marthomites had been enthusiastic in reading newspapers and listening to the radio in their pre-television days, they have not shown such an interest towards another modern medium, namely films. Moreover, for a major period in the seventy-five year old Malayalam film industry, most Marthomites considered film to be anathema.[9]

Many families remembered that going to the cinema was a stigma in their households. Consequently, film-going was frowned upon and caricatured as a symptom of deviant behaviour.[10] Reflecting on the situation about thirty years ago, Thankachan says:

> In those days seeing films was not considered a good habit by the society in general. The tendency was to view film-going on par with social evils or at least with committing a grave mistake. A comment that 'he goes for films' was enough to indicate that his life was not in the right track and he was deviant. That one comment had all the potential to tarnish his image and finish him off.[11]

One can assume from the above comment that one of the enquiries in those days, especially in connection with marriage alliances, would have been about the boy's film-going practices. As Thankachan suggested, those who were branded as film-goers could not have expected a good alliance and social standing.

In many families cinema was a taboo. The now elder members like Oonnukallil Samuel and Inchakkalayil Elikkutty were never taken to a cinema or given any reasons against film-going. Elikkutty knows only to say that in "those days it was a shame and nobody used to go like that.[12] Unlike Elikkutty and Samuel, Anjilivelil Abraham is only in his middle age but he too was not told anything explicitly against cinema except that the sanction had something to do with the church.

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[8] This is story-telling with songs and musical accompaniments. This was a popular entertainment in Kerala, perhaps, until the arrival of television.

[9] The platinum jubilee of Malayalam film was celebrated in 2003.

[10] See Introduction (i). Also see, Paul Hartmann, B. R. Patil and Anita Dighe. 1989. *The Mass Media and Village Life: An Indian Study*. New Delhi: Sage. p. 233

[11] Inchakkalayil Family. *Interview*. 29-05-2001

[12] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

Most of the families do remember, very clearly, however, objections and arguments against cinema. Both the Marthoma and Muslim families shared that films were prohibited on religious grounds. The Hindus, on the other hand, do not remember any such objections. In their case, the opposition was mainly on financial and practical grounds.

For the Marthomites, abstinence from cinema was projected as part of a Marthoma identity. Chechamma was stating a commonly held opinion when she says:

> My grandfather was a highly spiritual man in the Marthoma Church. He had the reformation spirit. He used to tell us that as Apostle Paul said we should not resort to drunkenness and orgy. Cinema is orgy and we should not go. Film-going is for the gentiles. People who know God will not go for films. In his language believers should not go and sit amongst the non-believers, as there is no common ground between the two. So believers should not go to toddy shop or cinema. I am saying the language of those days.[13]

The "language" of the grandparents of Edayilyath Deenamma or Arackal Babu and parents of Neduvellil Oommen or Ottaplackal Renjan was not any different. All of them admonished their children or grandchildren, as in the case of Chechamma, that film viewing compromises their Marthoma identity in various ways as implied in the above comment. Recalling those days, Susamma complains, "What to say about films? Everything was sin in those days. Seeing film was sin, going to theatre was sin. This was the mentality that we had in life."[14]

It means that Marthoma identity was defined partly by a negative attitude towards cinema. This becomes clear also from the recollections of women who became Marthomites by marriage. Some of the interview participants like Inchakkalayil Bini was a Catholic whereas Kottarathil Kunjumol and Anjilivelil Aleyamma were Jacobites before their marriage and all of them said that they had a fairly relaxed attitude towards films in their parental homes. Kunjumol went to the cinema with her brothers whereas Aleyamma went with her parent. Marriage to a Marthomite, however, brought a radical change to their film-going. Bini recounts:

> In my house we were going to films. Mostly I went with my brothers and sisters-in-law. It was only with my marriage that film-going had stopped. Since then I had been to the cinema only once. After that it is only now in television that I watch films.

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[13] Chekkulath Family. *Interview.* 25-05-2001

[14] Neduvellil Family. *Interview.* 15-06-2001

S:[15] Were you a Marthomite before marriage?

Bini: No, I was a Catholic.

S: Your family had no problem in going to theatre?

Bini: We had no problem.[16]

Marriage to a Marthomite, for Bini and some of the non-Marthomite women, thus, has not only resulted in a change in their denominational affiliation but also has stopped their practice of watching films.

Marthomites seem to have differed from some other Christian denominations in their attitude to cinema, indicating their perception of Marthoma identity. Since I have not included any non-Marthoma Christian families in this study, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about differences between families of various Christian denominations in this regard. The favourable attitude of Catholics and Jacobites towards films and the opposition of Marthomites to the same, however, seem to reflect the attitudes towards images and icons that I discussed in the second chapter.[17] From this one can perhaps assume, though it is not explicitly stated, that the opposition of Marthomites to film is partly founded on their apprehension of images.

They, however, explicitly stated two reasons for their apprehension of cinema. Firstly, they did not welcome the idea of going to a theatre and secondly they were apprehensive of the film contents. In fact, cinema and films were inseparable and hence were synonymous until the arrival of television. Chechamma, in an earlier quote in this chapter, suggested that film-going is considered to be a practice of the "gentiles" and it is a place that "believers should not go." The fear, as some others like the Charuvils reveal in the following exchange, was that going to the cinema would corrupt people in bad company.

S: What is the problem in going to theatre?

John: If we go to theatre...all types of people come there and not all are of good character. When you relate with them, some may call you

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[15] In this and subsequent quotes in this study *S* stands for my name.

[16] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

[17] This does not mean that other denominations like the Catholics were supportive of cinema. As I have pointed out in the Introduction (iii), Hartman and others, report a Catholic church penalising one of its members for going to the cinema.

to go to liquor shop, others may give you a cigarette. So there is a possibility of getting into bad company.[18]

One might wonder, considering the use of the words like "gentiles", "non-believers", and "bad company," in the above comments whether there may have been an unspoken but deep-seated caste consciousness with its notions of purity and pollution operative behind this prohibition along with a genuine concern for getting into bad habits.

This may seem to suggest that the problem in those days was mostly to do with the place (cinema) rather than the films themselves. This is partly true, especially considering the families' present practice of watching films on television. Some families, however, gave the impression that film content also was considered problematic. The Charuvils themselves clarified this issue.

S: So the problem is not in seeing films, but in going to the theatre?

John: Yeah, that is it. But there are bad films as well. Not all films are good. Some are bad and may spoil us.[19]

Elders like Edayilyath Deenamma and Chekkulath Chechamma also shared similar apprehensions concerning the content of the films. Deenamma believes that undesirable models are being presented in films. What is in them to imitate except "unwanted things" she asks.[20]

The vehement objection of Marthomites' against films is something that Muslim families too have shared. As Usman explains in the following exchange, film-going was considered an inappropriate media practice for a Muslim.

S: Did your parents go to cinema?

Usman: No they did not.

S: Why was it?

Usman: Why because they were not interested. They would not go. Neither my father nor mother went for it.

S: Did they know about your film-going?

Usman: They said no to it. Even then I used to go.

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[18] Charuvil Family. *Interview.* 14-05-2001. I do remember listening in my childhood to itinerant preachers quoting Psalm 1:1 (Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers) to suggest film-going as one of the practices prohibited for believers.

[19] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[20] Edayilyath Family. *Interview.* 28-05-2001

S: Why is it that they said no?

Usman: The reason...that is...one should not see films. Those who see them will not see Nabi's *thrikkan kalyanam*[21] after their death.

S: Did many from your community go to film those days?

Usman: Not many had ventured in those days.

S: What about you Miriam?

Miriam: In my house too nobody went for it. My parents also said the same thing about Nabi's *kalyanam*.[22]

If Usman and Miriam remember the sanction against film linked with a specific religious belief, Noorudin and Sainaba of the other Muslim household in this study were simply told that "film-going is against Islam."[23] In short, Muslims, like Marthomites, opposed cinema on religious grounds and condemned it in strong words.

Hindus, however, unlike Marthomites and Muslims, seem to have no religious objections to films, even though they do not frequent cinemas. They implied that had there been enough money and access to a cinema, film-going would not have been much of a problem. Suvarna Nivas Uthaman Nair, for instance, was away from home and was seeing films every day, even twice at times, courtesy of his film-representative friend. He felt that the reason for many "of our people not seeing film," in those days was a question of affordability. "Who had money those days?" he asks. "It was only two *chakrams* for the 'floor ticket'[24] but even that was difficult to manage. One had to sell six coconuts to get two *chakrams* in those days."[25] Apart from money, Pulloli Thankappan suggested lack of facilities and practical difficulties dampening his film-going. "Who had seen it [films] to get interested in? Where was it?" he asks. "For us the one or two theatres in this area were six and eight miles away and going there in the night was not a welcome proposition. My mother was

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[21] On asking them to explain about this they told me that the righteous, after their death, will have the privilege of witnessing Nabi's marriage. I was later told by an Indian scholar of Islam that he does not recognise such a teaching in the Quran.

[22] Thenguvila Family. *Interview*. 21-06-2001

[23] Valiyaveettil Family. *Interview*. 28-06-2001

[24] A 'floor ticket' was the cheapest ticket available in a theatre, which entitled the holder to sit on the floor right in front of the screen.

[25] Suvarna Nivas Family. *Interview*. 24-06-2001. *Chakrams* were the old coins used before the introduction of rupee and paise.

afraid to send us," he adds.[26] The Punnooreths had no such problems as they were living near a theatre and their father accompanied them to the cinema. Sarasamma remembers very vividly her going to the cinema about sixty years ago. She recalls:

> There was no sanction against film-going. My father used to go once in a while and he took me along. It was the early days of cinema in this part of the town. There was such a rush at the ticket counter that once when I squeezed in my hand through the counter my glass bangles were broken. I was very sad for it.[27]

Her daughter-in-law Ammini too had no prohibitions in her ancestral home but as Uthaman Nair suggested, had only a "money problem."[28]

This apparently relaxed attitude of Hindus towards films was also shared by some of the Dalit Marthomites, who had a Hindu background. Kuzhivila Lilly, for instance, could go to films without any religious problems. "In my childhood," she says, "I was not in this Christian faith...My brothers used to call me for films and I went with them."[29] Similarly, Mullumkuzhy Mini and Muruppel Ninan said that they were permitted to go to a few films when they were young.

From the above discussion it is clear that unlike the Hindus or those from the Hindu background, Marthomites, like Muslims, perceived cinema to be against their religious faith and practice. In portraying film-going as a practice of 'gentiles' or unbelievers they were constructing an identity in terms of their media practice, especially with regard to their abstinence from films. Through the use of Pauline terms like 'orgy' to portray cinema, the Marthomites were given the inference that film-going not only can tarnish their image on earth but as sin can also deny them salvation. In other words, the Marthomites seemed to believe that their entry to the Kingdom of God had a negative link with their practice of film-going.

Both Marthomite and Muslim men, however, transgressed this prohibition against going to the cinemas. All of them with whom I talked, from Oonnukallil Samuel the oldest to Arackal Babu the youngest, revealed that they had gone to the cinema at least once or twice in the days when it was prohibited. As they were certain of not

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[26] Pulloli Family. *Interview.* 20-06-2001

[27] Punnooreth Family. *Interview.* 25-06-2001

[28] Punnooreth. *Interview.*

[29] Kuzhivila Family. *Interview.* 15-05-2001

getting their parent's permission and were sure to receive a beating or scolding if asked, all of them said to have gone in secret and covered it up when caught.

Going to the cinema, for them, was like eating a forbidden fruit. Anjilivelil Abraham though never told of any specific reasons against films was afraid to go publicly. "I did not want anybody to see me going to or coming from the theatre," he says. "Once I went and stood in the queue only to see my elder brother standing ahead. I don't know how I ran from there," he recollects with a laugh.[30]

It is perhaps ironic that when film-going was anathema, in terms of religious beliefs and denominational identity, at least some of the Marthomites chose religious meetings themselves as an alibi for going to the cinema. Babu narrates with a laugh:

> It was my *appachan*[31] who taught me about spiritual matters. Had he known about my film-going he would have scolded or even beaten me. Since I managed to go without his knowledge I escaped his ire. Once, however, I was nearly caught. There was a convention here in our nearby town and my cousin and I wanted to see a film. For conventions *appachan* was always ready to send us. So we asked him whether we could go. *Appachan* had not only given us permission but also gave some money for the offertory. Since the convention was in the night and slightly far from our house we were sent with an *upadesi*[32] who was going from this area. Once we reached the convention cite, our 'guardian' *upadesi* went and sat just in front of the platform. So we quietly withdrew from there and went for a film in a nearby theatre. Since the film was over before the benediction was pronounced at the convention we met with the *upadesi* after the benediction and came home. The climax came in the morning. *Appachan* asked me what the sermon was on. I hardly knew anything other than something on the 'wedding at Cana'[33] and said it was about the 'turning of water into wine.' *Upadesi* came later in the morning and while talking *appachan* asked him about the sermon. He said what it was on. Once he left, *appachan* enquired why *upadesi* and I heard different sermons at the convention. I said, '*appachan*, wedding at Cana was one of the illustrations used in the sermon and I liked it.' Somehow I escaped with that.[34]

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[30] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[31] Grand father and father-in-law are addressed as *appachan* and father is called *achayan* by many Christians in central Kerala. While *appachan* is still in use, *achayan* is increasingly being replaced with Daddy, Pappa and Appa.

[32] Local or itinerant preacher.

[33] John 2: 1–11

[34] Arackal Family. *Interview.* 11-05-2001

Charuvil Chacko did not escape that easily from a similar plot. Even though he said he had gone to a convention at *Zionkunnu*[35] his father did not believe him and that was the end of his film-going.

Men only could endeavour to such adventure in terms of film-going and hence there was a gender difference in film viewing. All the women, except Karivedakath Joyamma, in this study had been to a cinema at least once in their life-time but unlike the men, they had gone only with permission. Reflecting the restricted mobility of women in a patriarchal society they needed somebody to take them and if they did not have such a one, as in the case of Joyamma, even that rare chance had vanished into thin air. In the case of some others like Charuvil Ponnamma and Karivedakath Sheeba the opportunity came when their school arranged a trip to a cinema.

Even then such an exposure was a once in a lifetime affair and the prohibition was strong. Kunjamma says:

> My father would not allow us even to go from the school. So once or twice when teachers were taking us to a theatre, I cried and cried and my mother let us go without my father knowing. But as I was growing up even my mother stopped showing such lenience.[36]

This trend has continued until recently. A relatively young Suma shares: "My father did not allow us to read film magazines, hear film songs or see films mainly because we are four daughters and he wanted us to grow up with discipline and character."[37] In short, "discipline and character" was built on avoiding anything to do with films.

Avoidance of films had gained such a normative status among Marthomites in the pre-television days that even those men who ventured to the cinema did not consider it a practice worth emulating. Like some of those who smoke or drink but prohibit their children from doing the same, some of the film-goers were careful to ensure that their children did not follow in their footsteps. Remembering her late husband and with a laugh, Elikkutty comments, "He used to see films, but never wanted our children to go."[38]

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[35] A hill named after Zion where evangelistic prayer meetings were held.

[36] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[37] Niravath. *Interview.*

[38] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

The discussion in this section shows that in the pre-television days, Marthomites gave prominence to literary and aural media like newspaper and radio on the one hand and rejected an audio-visual medium like film on the other. Perhaps, as we have discussed in Chapter Two, this domestic mediascape may have been a reflection of their ecclesial culture, which used oral and literary means of communication and shunned images and icons.[39] While the above discussion has not shown any explicit religious legitimisation for the use of newspaper and radio, one can recognise the importance given to the printed and spoken word in the reformed tradition of the Marthomites. Their anti-image/theatre tradition may have prompted them to condemn film viewing with terms like 'sin' and 'orgy' in the days when oral and literary traditions prevailed. Even though there were contradictions between Marthoma ideals and actual practice with regard to cinema, film-going was generally portrayed as a practice against their Marthoma identity.

How did these Marthomites respond to another audio-visual medium, namely television, considering their vehement religious repudiation of cinema? One might expect them to carry over their anti-image attitude towards television as well. On the contrary, I show in the next two sections that Marthomites have not only welcomed television to their domestic mediascape but also have shifted their media practice along with it.

4.3 Arrival of television

Why it is that Marthomites accepted television despite their opposition to film is a question that I raised in the beginning of this study. In this section I shall answer this partly by marking the entry of television into the Marthoma households. What is discussed in this connection is their exposure to television, reasons for buying a set of their own, purchase and placement of the set in the domestic space.

Before proceeding to understand the entry of television into Marthoma households in Kerala, I shall, for the sake of placing it in context, first look at the development of television viewing in Kerala as a whole. Though television broadcasts had begun in the late 1950s in India, some parts of the country like Kerala were slow in receiving them when compared with other parts. As I have discussed in Chapter One, various political, experimental and commercial reasons were responsible for this apparent

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[39] 2.4

inequality. In Kerala, as mentioned, television viewing was rather slow in the early part of *Doordarshan*, gaining momentum only during the 1990s. This was mainly due to the lack of transmission centres and the very small output in Malayalam. It was only in the second half of the 1980s that Thiruvananthapuram (then Trivandrum), the capital city of Kerala, earned a place among the *Doordarshan* centres in India. Even then it functioned mainly to transmit the 'National programmes' which were unfailingly in Hindi with occasional and patchy programmes in Malayalam. What changed this dismal and to some extent 'discriminatory' scenario was the emergence of cable television in the first part of the 1990s and more importantly that of regional language channels.

As has been mentioned in Chapter One, the proliferation of regional language channels occurred with the introduction of cable television.[40] In Kerala it began with *Asianet* in 1992 marking the first full-time television broadcast in Malayalam. Two other private cable television channels, *Surya* and *Kairali* have come to the fore within the last few years.[41] *Doordarshan* followed suit by starting a Malayalam satellite channel. *Asianet* has emerged as not only the first Malayalam channel but also the sole distributor of cable television in Kerala, aided by a government decision allowing them to distribute cable along the electric power supply line posts in Kerala.[42] *Surya*, the second Malayalam channel, is a subsidiary of *Sun TV* which is a major Tamil language channel. The beginning of *Kairali* was embroiled in controversy because of its perceived ownership by the Communist Marxist Party in Kerala. Cumulatively, these channels provide Malayalam programmes on television with greater choice and longer viewing time than was possible about five years ago.

Reflecting on the change which came with cable television Bini says:

> Earlier it was only *Doordarshan* and its programmes that we could see. Now by just changing the number we can see many programmes all the time and that too in Malayalam. We keep cable most of the time.[43]

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[40] 1.2.3

[41] *Surya* started telecast in 1998.

[42] K. L. Vineetha. 1999. Television Programme Viewing Preferences of Asianet Subscribers in Thiruvananthapuram City. Master of Communication and Journalism Thesis, University of Kerala. p. 6

[43] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

For those families who bought television sets recently, like the Edayilyaths, Anjilivelils, Suvarna Nivas' and others, television means cable television because they bought a cable connection on the day of purchasing their television set. Instead of a cable connection, the Valiyaveettil family opted for the "more cost effective" dish antenna.[44] In other families in this study, however, it was only *Doordarshan* that provided their viewing for many years before the arrival of cable television. Widespread viewing with cable is still in its infancy and how it impacts on the Marthoma families is one of the focal points of this research. Before moving into this enquiry in the following chapters, let us look at how the viewing itself began for the families participated in this study.

4.3.1 Exposure to television

The spread of television viewing was gradual in Kerala depending mainly on technological development and financial resources. Those who lived within the transmission range of Thiruvananthapuram *Doordarshan Kendra* were among the first television viewers in Kerala. The capital city had community television sets in some of its public parks making it possible for some of the families in this study to watch even before buying a set of their own. People in other parts of Kerala, depending on their distance from this *Kendra*, had to put up antennae twenty or thirty feet above the ground in order to receive the signals.

Oonnukallil Tom and Niravath Philip are the two migrant workers who lived with their families outside Kerala and hence had the opportunity to watch television for many years before the spread of television in Kerala. Tom and family were in Nigeria and as they "used to watch television" they brought a set on their return to Kerala about fifteen years ago.[45] Likewise, Niravath Philip was in Mumbai in 1976, witnessing the early days of television broadcasts and then moved to Kuwait where he continued watching television. He also brought a television set on his return to Kerala. Apart from them, as in the case of other mass media like newspaper and radio, it was the upper or upper-middle class families who were able to buy television sets in the beginning of its proliferation in Kerala. For instance, the Neduvellil family had an opportunity to watch television in the early 1980s when Oommen's brother brought a set from the Gulf. Later they bought a set from his

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[44] Valiyaveettil. *Interview*.

[45] Oonnukallil Family. *Interview*. 23-06-2001

sister when she also brought one from the Gulf. Similarly, the Ottaplackals too purchased a set early on. All others watched television for the first time in the house of a neighbour or relative.

4.3.1.1 Television viewing as hospitality

Watching television courtesy of their neighbour or relative, in a sense, was like enjoying hospitality in the neighbourhood. Babu was not the only one to say:

> In this neighbourhood it is my cousin who first bought a TV and then television was a great thing. In those days we used to go as a family to watch the programmes. Then another cousin bought one and as he was staying close by we began to go there. They used to inform and invite us saying about a Malayalam film or Maramon Convention report and we used to go. It was only later that I bought a set here.[46]

Since television was a 'great thing' in those days, as Babu puts it, people made the effort to visit houses near and far to watch it.[47] The women and children of the Mullumkuzhy, Kuzhivila and Chekkulath families used to cover some distance to reach their relatives to watch television. The Edayilyath boys went to two places, crossing the road, but it was not as busy as the one the Suvarna Nivas family had to venture across in their pursuit of viewing television. Only very few women like Bini and Pushpa of the Inchakkalayil family could not avail themselves of this hospitality since none of their neighbours "had a set and a relative who had one was staying far away."[48] However their father-in-law used to go and watch.

As Babu testified, most of the more fortunate television owners were considerate of their 'less privileged' neighbours or relatives and appreciated such visitations.[49] The Kuzhivilas, who had a reversal in their role from guests to hosts of television viewing, reveal in the following exchange their happiness in facilitating television viewing despite certain inconveniences.

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[46] Arackal. *Interview.*

[47] Similar viewing is reported elsewhere. For instance in the United Kingdom, viewing in the early days of television was "a habit shared with the people next door." *Annual Register*. 1950. p. 413. Cited Asa Briggs. 1979. *Sound and Vision*. The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. IV. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 245. Also see, Liesbet Van Zoonen and Jan Wieten. 1994. "'It wasn't Exactly a Miracle': The Arrival of Television in Dutch Family Life". *Media, Culture and Society* 16, no. 4.

[48] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[49] Arackal. *Interview.*

Lilly: We will not keep TV when children study. But if those who do not have television come to watch a programme and if they want to see that serial continuously how can we say no to them? Many would come, and today just now they all left after seeing a film. Usually they come for the serials in the afternoon.

S: Is it not a difficulty that they all come to watch?

Lilly: We do not feel like that. It may be a difficulty. But we also, when we did not have TV, used to go to other places. Is it not the same with them? So whoever comes we invite. They are coming because they do not have it. So I am happy that they come.

S: Where do they sit?

Lilly: When others, especially old people come to watch, we leave this few chairs for them and sit on the floor. It is mostly women and children who come. Men don't come, as my husband is not here during the daytime.[50]

The concern to take care of the guests rather than one's own interests, reception given to them on arrival and the composition of the guests as described in the above comments, among other things, indicate that television viewing has assumed proportions of offering and enjoying hospitality. The Pullolis, like the Kuzhivilas, continue to have visitors, especially for the weekend films.

Those who were watching television courtesy of others, however, revealed that they had always been concerned not to abuse the hospitality and to avoid the minor irritations that used to come up in such visitations. Though they appreciated their neighbour's patronage, which was indeed another sense of a prevailing community feeling, they were hoping to obviate the need for it as soon as possible and said that they grabbed the first available chance to buy a television set as if to justify the Malayalam idiom, "stop singing when the voice is good."[51]

4.3.2 Reasons for buying a television set

Whether they were welcome or not in another family, most families wanted a television set at home. "Isn't it natural for every one to desire a television set of one's own?" asks one of the interview participants.[52] It may be "natural" to wish for a television set, but as revealed in this section, Marthomites and other families in this study procured a set for different reasons and with varying difficulties.

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[50] Kuzhivila. *Interview.*

[51] In Malayalam it is, *swaram nallappazhe pattu niruthanam.*

[52] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

The obvious reason for wanting a television set was the fascination with the medium.[53] It was deemed a "great thing," as Babu puts it in an earlier quote. Neduvellil Susamma found television attractive. "When we saw it for sometime in our brothers' place we felt that it is good and necessary," she says.[54] Besides this fascination and their concern to keep neighbourly relations intact, Marthoma families seem to have at least three other reasons for buying a television set. These are, as discussed below, 1) the demand from family members, 2) the perception of television as a sign of progress and a status symbol, and 3) the absence of any religious sanctions against television.

In many families, children were the immediate cause for buying a television set. They were persistent in their demand making their parents give in. Rosamma recalls:

> We bought it mainly because of the children. When they were small and before their father went to Gulf we had a bakery near the junction. At that time he suggested buying a TV, but I do not know why, I discouraged him. Somehow I did not like buying it. Then children grew up and began their schooling. From then onwards they started to complain about their friends having television at home. Then our neighbour bought one and the children began to go there...As the children began to compel I wrote to their father and the next time he came he brought this set.[55]

Rosamma is no exception in implying that had it not been for their children they would not have bought a television set. Abraham says:

> Children used to ask for permission on Sundays to go here and there to watch television. Then it so happened, someone said he was selling his set and I had some money. So I bought it thinking that instead of going here and there let them sit at home and watch.[56]

However, television is not bought for the sake of children alone. In many families such as the Inchakkalayils, Oonnukallils, Karivedakaths, Pullolis, and Chekkulaths it was the elders who were the catalysts or immediate beneficiaries of buying a television set by their working children. Chechamma remembers it clearly, "as if yesterday." She says:

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[53] I shall discuss some aspects of this fascination like, television as window to the world, in the next chapter.

[54] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[55] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[56] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

> After my husband died Sali and I were alone. At that time only one of my relatives, the one who stays three houses from here, had a television set and we both used to go. Whenever we got bored by sitting idle at home we visited him and he used to put on either TV or film cassettes. My second daughter is in Kuwait and when she came home for holidays she bought this set saying that I need not have to go somewhere else to see TV.[57]

Whether television was bought for the sake of children by their parents or by the working children for their elderly parents, one of the common concerns was to avoid their visiting other houses to watch television. It shows that visiting other houses for television viewing is considered a sign of deprivation. In other words, television seems to have changed notions of deprivation. As Sevanti Ninan rightly comments, "the child who has to watch a cricket match on television through his neighbour's window is a deprived child. So his parents aspire to assuage that deprivation."[58] The present study reveals, however, that it is not always the children who are the objects of deprivation. It could be the children or the elderly parents. Either way, buying a television set has come to be regarded as part of fulfilling a family responsibility and those who could not afford it took great pains, as we shall see shortly, to achieve this goal.

It is neither a compulsion from the children nor a compassion for the parents that prompted the purchase of television in some families in this study. The working adults in such families suggested themselves as the beneficiaries of television. However, they cited a different reason for buying a set, that is, television as a sign of progress or development. Ottaplackal Renjan and Arackal Babu disclosed that more than the possibility of personal viewing or the novelty effect, television for them is a sign of modernity. Renjan explains:

> There was newspaper and then came radio. I had both and when television came and spread I bought it also. Is it not part of a development? Now it is gone even beyond television to computers and internet, isn't it? So we also move with such developments.[59]

Babu elaborated this position saying that television is not only a new development but also an essential one in modern times. He argues, "We are living in modern times

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[57] Chekkulath. *Interview.*

[58] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window.* p. 82

[59] Ottaplackal Family. *Interview.* 22-06-2001

and television is necessary. We should see television. The age of radio has gone and now we can see things directly."[60]

Since television is perceived as a sign of modernity, it is considered to be a status symbol. Because of the financial investment involved, the very purchase of a television set would indicate a certain material capital of the family. Asa Briggs cites a newspaper comment in London that "the television aerial has become the symbol of social superiority down our street."[61] What was reported in 1948 in London seems to be the same in 2001 in a village in Kerala. Or perhaps, television is a status symbol in Kerala because of its stature elsewhere.

The 'foreign-return' migrant workers bringing a television set as part of their luggage[62] may also have added to its glamour implying that having a television is part of a modern and developed (western) way of life. This perhaps explains why the delay in the Suvarna Nivas family in buying a television set raised many eyebrows and made people curious. Vijayamma recalls:

> We constructed this house five, six years ago but bought television only three years ago. Ever since we built this house, friends and relatives had been asking, 'why, even after having a big house, you are not buying television.'[63]

Television has gained the status, as Vijayamma implied, of being part of the essential domestic appliances for certain types of houses. Miriam went one step further to suggest that the time has come to regard television as an essential part of every household, irrespective of their material capital. "Nowadays even in houses which struggle to buy rice, there is TV, fan and things like that," she declares. [64] The tag of 'progress' and social status attached to television seem to have inspired many to purchase a set in Kerala.[65]

Another reason that enabled Marthomites to purchase a television set is, I suggest, the apparent absence of religious sanction against television. All Marthoma families in this study suggested that the Marthoma church has not issued any call to boycott

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[60] Arackal. *Interview.*

[61] Briggs. *Sound and Vision.* p. 243

[62] See 1.4.2

[63] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

[64] Thenguvila. *Interview.*

[65] See my comment in the Introduction (i) on the sexton in my parish, purchasing a set.

television. Rosamma, one of the interview participants went to the extent of implying in the following exchange that it was good that the church did not intervene.

> *S*: Have you heard anything said about television in the church?
>
> *Rosamma*: (Pause) O Nothing. What to say? *Atchans* also have and watch television and cable. So will they say that we should not use cable? If they were to say that, will we listen?[66]

With no religious exhortation to prevent them (or perhaps with a readiness to defy one) only a slight hesitation over finance and children's education dissuaded some families from viewing or buying a television set.[67] Considering the importance Marthomites give to their community and religious tradition any religious sanction would have been a barrier for them to welcome television into their domestic mediascape.

The fact that Marthoma and Hindu families did not have any theological or religious problems with television is significant given that they harboured divergent attitudes to films. As discussed earlier, Hindus did not have any religious problems in seeing films whereas Marthomites, like Muslims, did have sanctions against cinema on religious grounds. When it came to another audio-visual medium, television, Marthomites, unlike Muslims, made no calls for boycotting it.

Muslims, at least certain sections of them and for a short period of time, carried over some of their apprehension of films to television. Usman comments:

> *S*: Are you sure that many Muslim houses still do not see TV?
>
> *Miriam*: Nowadays every house has it. Everybody sees it. After *niskaram*[68] they sit and see.
>
> *Usman*: Yeah, some of us see, but not everybody. If you go to the neighbourhood of *Juma Masjid* there are many families that do not see TV even today.
>
> *Miriam*: I don't know about men, but women see.
>
> *Usman*: Not like that. Some of our people, who are very religious, do not keep television in their house. They will read only *Quran*. I have not learned any of that sorts and that is why I have become like this.[69]

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[66] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[67] I shall discuss this in great detail in Chapter Six.

[68] Prayer.

[69] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

The opposition to television among Muslims, as Usman notes, was reported from other parts of India too, especially in the eighties and nineties. In 1994, for instance, a few Muslim families in Mumbai "[tipped] their television sets out of the window" in response to a Maulana's exhortation on the evils of television.[70] Those who did not throw the sets away sold or gave them away so that within weeks there were no sets left in about 300 flats. "They were doing away, they said, with Satan's tool."[71] Saroj Malik reports a similar reproach from her survey in two villages in Uttar Pradesh in March 1988. She cites one of her interviewees saying, "It is a sin to watch images. Quran says that when the world will be nearing doomsday there would be songs and dances in every household. Those who would remain away from these would be beloved of Allah."[72]

Miriam, Usman's wife suggested that the force of such opposition is gradually lessening among Muslims. She indicates how the time has changed:

> Some years ago our parents objected to television viewing. In their children's time television has come everywhere. We are using it and they see we are watching it and they do not object. Even they themselves come, sit, watch and say it is good to pass time.[73]

In fact, as I have indicated in the introductory chapter there have been polemical writings against television and calls to 'turn it off' among certain sections of Christians in the West.[74] In the United States, L. M. Bourgault found that members of one Pentecostal Church in Ohio branded watching movies and television as sinful.[75] In India, Pentecostals are believed to have nursed a similar attitude to television in its early days. Since it is not my intention to discuss various Christian denominations' approach to television, it is sufficient to draw attention to the fact that though both Marthomites and Muslims branded film-going so severe a sin that it denies them entry to heaven, Marthomites found no religious problems in buying a television set.

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[70] Sevanti Ninan. 1995. *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. p. 1.

[71] Ninan. *Through the Magic Window*. p. 1

[72] Saroj Malik. 1989. "Television and Rural India". *Media, Culture and Society* 4, no. 11. p. 468

[73] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

[74] See Introduction (v.ii.i)

[75] L. M. Bourgault. 1985."The PTL Club and Protestant viewers: An ethnographic study". *Journal of Communication* 35, no. 1

Why do the Marthomites have no religious sanction against television? One can only assume the reasons. Perhaps, the fascination with the medium or its perception as a sign of modern life has made it acceptable. Or perhaps, television as an audiovisual medium may have been found different from their word and print oriented ecclesial culture and hence less of a threat to their religious life. Whatever the reason, not only have the Marthomites abstained from boycotting television but they have also bought television sets at the earliest possible time.

4.3.3 Purchase of a television set

The various reasons that I have discussed above may have made Marthomites welcome television into their households and, as I shall discuss below, enabled them, especially the materially poor, to go to great lengths to purchase a set. It is generally observed that financial resources do play a great role in the media practice of people.[76] The present study concurs with that observation, because except for the few upper-middle or middle class families, buying a set was indeed a matter of struggle and sacrifice for most families who participated in the interview. Chacko was not the only one to say, "In the early days television was not spread in this area, and when it spread we did not have money. So I waited."[77]

Like other commodities and gadgets at home, the type and brand of the television set also have come to bear the stamp of the financial resources of the family. For instance, in Mullumkuzhy family, the grandmother, a manual labourer, who bought a television set could manage only a second-hand black and white set.[78] Her daughter-in-law, Mini and children wanted a colour television "to see in colour" but did not say so because they had to be mindful of the "affordability, before making such a demand," says Mini. [79] They had to wait another three years to be able to buy a second-hand colour television set.

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[76] For instance, it is noted that in the 1920s only a few could afford to buy a wireless set in the United Kingdom. See Asa Briggs. 1961. *The Birth of Broadcasting*. The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. III. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 17

[77] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[78] This is the one family where television was bought by an elder member of the family to avoid, the "daughter-in-law and grandchildren going two furlongs to see film on Sundays." Mullumkuzhy Family. *Interview*. 16-05-2001

[79] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

Those who did not have ready cash took out a loan or bought on a hire/purchase basis. Muruppel Sam borrowed money from a relative to buy an old black-and-white set from a second-hand shop. The Edayilyath family accepted the offer of an instalment package from a shop in the nearby town, which they repaid in three years. For the Punnooreths, buying a set was a moment of sacrifice.

> *Ammini*: We bought a black-and-white three years ago. It was not because of affordability that we bought. Children were going here and there and most of the time they were not here. So during *Onam* festival I told my husband that I will manage to buy the food items and vegetables but he does not need to buy the customary dress for everybody. Instead, I told him, if we buy a television then everybody could sit and watch. So for that year's *Onam* we did not buy dress but bought TV.[80]

Even with such sacrifices, many families could manage only a second hand black-and-white set. Like Ammini, they all would like to have a colour television set especially with a 21 inch screen, but some of them would still be satisfied if their old black-and-white set didn't break down.

The purchase of a television set, in short, has been difficult for many families. The very fact that they were willing to undergo much pain and sacrifice in procuring a television set illustrates that television has come to be accepted as an essential domestic medium and television viewing is an accepted media practice.

4.3.4 Placement of television

In all families once a television set had been bought the immediate concern was its placement. In most of the houses some adjustments and relocations had to be made to place it in such a way that it could be viewed easily and by all. As a result, as I have described in the family profiles in the previous chapter, television has come to occupy a prominent place in the living room.[81] The Kottarathils shifted their ironing table to another room while the Charuvils bought a smaller dining table to create space to keep the television set in the veranda itself. It was only Neduvellil Oommen who incorporated a place for the television in the design of his house. The Ottaplackals and the Niravaths on the other hand demarcated separate spaces for viewing purposes. I shall discuss the importance of such reorganisation in the

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[80] Punnooreth. *Interview*.

[81] See 3.3

concluding chapter. Suffice it to say here that television has its influence on the geography of the domestic space, which of course was not the only change that television initiated in the domestic context.

4.4 Media use since the arrival of television

The advent of a modern mass medium has always raised the question of its possible influence on the use of existing media. For instance, in 1923 a question in the United Kingdom concerned the influence of radio. A broadcasting critic of that time, Lord Riddell, raised the following questions and comments:

> "What effect is radio going to have on life?...Are people going to read less? Are thy going to talk less?...Who can tell?...So far as the present generation is concerned I believe that those accustomed to read and who like reading will continue to read whether they use the radio or not. But what about the next generation brought up on radio? Are they going to prefer information through the medium of the ear to that through the medium of the eye?"[82]

What is implied in these questions is the potential of a new medium to displace the existing media practices. The introduction of television has also raised questions about its influence on other media at home.

In this last section of this chapter, I suggest that television is perceived to have altered the media practice of the Marthomites and other families in this study. This, in fact, is not unique to Kerala. In Chinese cities, for instance:

> Television has taken the place of other media for entertainment and information. Viewers said that the changes brought on by the introduction of television into the home affected their time spent with movies and radio the most. The nature of the change, however, is not the same for each partially discarded medium.[83]

There are similarities in the situations in the UK, China and Kerala. There are, however, significant differences too. The similarity is in the displacement television brought in the use of other media whereas the difference is in the nature of that displacement. For the Marthomite families in this study, the arrival of television, as I shall analyse below, has eclipsed their use of newspaper and radio on the one hand but increased a previously anathematised viewing of films on the other.

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[82] Lord Riddell. Cited. Briggs. *The Birth of Broadcasting*. p. 15

[83] James Lull and Se-Wen Sun. 1988. "Agent of Modernization: Television and Urban Chinese Families". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 207

4.4.1 Use of newspaper

Almost all families in this study have suggested that watching television at home has reduced their use of newspaper. Only the Niravaths and Suvarna Nivas' who "do not watch much television" are said to continue their use of newspaper as in their pre-television days.[84]

While the Kuzhivilas discontinued their newspaper even before buying a television set, four other families stopped taking it with the arrival of (cable) television. One of them explains:

> *Kunjumol*: We had newspaper. Once this [television] had come we thought we don't need everything and stopped the paper.
>
> *Rosamma*: (Laughs) Because, cable costs Rupees 100 and paper costs another hundred. Are there not other expenses? Educational expenses for the children and the like. News comes in the TV also. Only thing we miss is the details. So we stopped the newspaper.[85]

So television receives a higher priority than newspaper in terms of budgetary provisions. Those who can afford the additional cost of cable television continue to subscribe to a daily, but they also experience a decline in the amount of reading when compared to the pre-television days.

In fact, the obituary column, not available on television, seems to be the main reason for many to continue with their newspaper reading. Even the 'non-readers' read it to see "whether any relatives or friends are there."[86] Most people, especially the adults, will look first at the obituary page before looking at the front page to see the headlines. They read the headlines to decide which items to read and which to leave out. What is mostly left out, especially by women, is mainly political news, which constitutes the major part of news in most newspapers.

With television and news on television the urge to read a newspaper elsewhere, if not available at home, has also declined. Abraham, one reader who did not read at home, comments, "Before television, I was very keen to read the newspaper wherever it was found. Now I glance at it only if it comes in my way. Now you get the news on TV many times a day."[87]

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[84] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview*, Niravath. *Interview*.

[85] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[86] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[87] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

Perhaps television is the cause of newspaper getting the least attention among the children in the household. Deenamma, one of the elder participants in this study, complained that "despite her exhortation or even scolding, her grandchildren do not show much interest in reading newspaper."[88] Very few children in this study, like the Niravath boys and the Mullumkuzhy girls, read a daily regularly. The Ottaplackal girls and the Edayilyath boys read it once in a while. Most of them will jump to the sports page and none of them, including the regular readers, reads much. What they all read is news about television or a television guide.

So far I have been suggesting that the introduction of television has reduced the use of newspaper in most of the homes in this study. In fact, use of print media in general, not just newspaper, has declined in all the families. The exception, as I imply in Chapter Seven, is in the case of reading the Bible.

According to a report, the reading practice of only the elders has declined with the arrival of television.[89] This report, in co-operation with some publishers, also suggests that the reading of children is on the increase. The present study does not concur with this. Only Suvarna Nivas Ramya among the children was said to have an interest in reading books other than her school/college textbooks. She reads Malayalam fiction principally because of the book collection her teacher-parents have. They also subscribe to various general and children's magazines and encourage their children to read. Besides Ramya, Oonnukallil Sherin told of reading five or six novels but did not remember any of the titles. Nobody else said that they had read any novels or magazines.

I am not suggesting that Marthomites were known for their reading habits before the arrival of television, nor am I suggesting that with the arrival of television print media had seen its day in Kerala. But there seems to be an irony: on the one hand the number of publications and subscribers to newspapers are said to be on the increase;[90] on the other hand, people, at least the interview participants in this study, seem to be reading less. However, when compared to print media, a worse sufferer is radio.

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[88] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[89] Deepika.www.deepika.com. Saturday, June 19, 2004. Accessed at 10 hrs

[90] See Dionne Bunsha. 2002. The Rise of Print. http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1914/191040810.htm. Accessed on Thursday, January 06, 2005 at 17hrs

4.4.2 Use of radio and audiocassette player

The use of radio has been severely affected by television in Marthoma homes. A decline in the use of radio, irrespective of regional and religious backgrounds, reflects the overall trend in India as found in the National Readership Survey 2000.[91]

At present, very few families in this study use radio and then only occasionally. The only exception is the Suvarna Nivas who use radio (and newspaper) as they did in the pre-television days because they do not watch television much. They, in fact, have three radio sets and listen to many programmes including the morning and evening news. All the other families suggested a drastic drop in their use of radio. Chacko comments, "Earlier, I used to listen to radio for longer time. There was no TV at that time and there was *chalachithra ganangal* and other things after the news on Radio. Now there is television and no need to keep radio."[92]

If it is the obituary column which keeps newspaper reading alive in many families, the continued use of radio for three women is simply because of the twenty-minute programme of Christian devotional songs. This programme, which is not available on television, draws listeners three times a week. Saramma explains:

> Now I use it once in a while. On Tuesday and Wednesday mornings there is *bhakti ganangal* for which I keep it on. The boys do not bother. Their interest is in film and film songs. There is *bhakti ganangal* on Sunday morning also. Most of the Sundays I do not hear, as we will be busy going to church. If I do not go to church, then I will listen. Apart from this we do not use radio at all.[93]

The drastic reduction in the use of radio becomes glaringly obvious when we take note that a regular user like Saramma would listen to it for hardly forty minutes a week. Even Philip, who revealed that he had a "craze" for radio in his childhood, seldom uses it now, "except occasionally while driving."[94]

When television arrived radio almost became a redundant medium.[95] In many houses, the old radio set is an object of neglect, left in some corner. Babu recalls:

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[91] *NRS Report*. 2000. Accessed at the Malayala Manorama office, Kottayam.

[92] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[93] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[94] Niravath. *Interview*.

[95] I am not suggesting that radio is irrelevant in the Indian situation considering the fact that 67 million households in India have a radio set while only 61 million households (out of 192 million) have a television set. There are reports that in India, especially in Metropolitan cities, the youth are

> Before television we used to hear radio in the morning, afternoon and evening for news. Once television came, all this has changed. Now since we have TV, we don't use radio and we don't have time. In fact our radio had developed some problems and I never bothered to get it repaired at all. It is still lying down there.[96]

Babu is not the only one who let his radio lie 'somewhere'. It is the same story with the Pulloli, Inchakkalayil and Mullumkuzhy families. Mini comments, "We used radio to hear news and *chalachithra ganangal*. Just before we bought TV, radio stopped working. It is neither repaired nor replaced simply because we get everything on television."[97]

If radio lost the glory it had in the pre-television days, the fate of the audiocassette player is much the same. The 'tape recorder,' is still being used particularly to listen to religious songs, such as Maramon convention songs, which are not broadcast on television. Every year during the Maramon convention an audiocassette of all the twelve or thirteen new songs is made available by the Department of Sacred Music and Communications of the Marthoma Church. These songs are sung first at the convention and then learnt to be sung in the church, prayer meetings or at home.[98]

Almost all the Marthoma families which otherwise do not touch the radio continue to use the cassette player mainly to hear devotional songs. However, the frequency of such use is varied. Some like the Kottarathils use it every day while some others like the Charuvils use it occasionally. Most families use it only very rarely. Bini says, "We play when we get the new Maramon or such other cassettes, and hear them three, four times and that is it."[99] Valiyaveettil Noorudin follows the same pattern; he uses the cassette player only on getting a new cassette of Muslim folk songs called *Mappillappatt*.

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increasingly listening to radio while driving or travelling. Deepika. www.deepika.com. Monday, June 28, 2004. Accessed at 09 hrs. In western countries, for example in the UK, the downward trend of the use of radio has seen significant reversal in the last decade. See Jolyon P. Mitchell. 1999. *Visually Speaking: Radio and the Renaissance of Preaching*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark. pp. 47–56. What I am discussing is the fate of radio in houses which have a television set. As per the national readership survey 2002, radio ownership in urban India has dropped by 12% between 1999 and 2002. See Arul Selvan. 2002. [icernet] National Readership Survey 2002-Continuing Trends. http://listserv.cddc.vt.edu/pipermail/icernet/2002-September/000111.html. Accessed on Thursday, January 06, 2005 at 16hrs

[96] Arackal. *Interview*.

[97] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[98] In the last three years these and similar songs are made also in CDs and DVDs.

[99] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

As in the case of radio, if the Marthomite women play the audiocassette player it is invariably to listen to devotional songs which are otherwise not available on television. The children use it more for film songs. Of the children who use a tape recorder the Kottarathils prefer to hear Maramon convention or other devotional songs since they are in the Church choir. The Edayilyath boys on the other hand will use their player only if they have a film-song cassette. The girls of Kuzhivila play both film and devotional cassettes even though they "like to hear film songs more."[100] This inclination to film songs reflects, partly, the changed attitude to films among the Marthomites and the shift in their media consumption with the arrival of television.

4.4.3 Film viewing

If only glancing at their newspapers and turning away from listening to the radio are the result of the introduction of television into the families in this study, irrespective of their religious persuasions, this drastic downfall in their media practice might be compensated by a dramatic increase in their watching of films. In fact it was to watch films that the elders in the Inchakkalayil and Edayilyath families asked their children to buy a television set in the first place. Again, it was for no other reason that many Marthomites were flocking to their neighbours' veranda on a Sunday afternoon.

Television, in this sense, made film-viewing an accepted media practice for the Marthomites (and also for Muslims). Charuvil Chacko, who had been to a cinema just once in his lifetime, admits that had it not been for television he would not have seen any films. The importance given to films can be gauged from the fact that even those who claim to watch less television, like the Suvarna Nivas or the Niravaths, do not miss watching the film on Sunday evening. Watching film during the weekend has become a permanent fixture in many families and film is one programme which normally attracts a "full house." In Kerala one can hear many people saying that 'Sunday afternoon is cinema time.'[101]

Doordarshan, videocassette players (VCP/VCR) and cable television have promoted this practice of watching films among the Marthomites in this study. To begin with, they could only watch Malayalam film very rarely on *Doordarshan*. This was

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[100] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

[101] I will discuss the exception in this regard, especially the prioritisation of community worship over television viewing, in the next chapter.

because during its first two decades films did not feature prominently in the *Doordarshan* menu. A regional feature film was shown on the national network on Sunday afternoons and since it had to accommodate all regional language films, Malayalam films were telecast only once or twice a year. It took years for *Doordarshan* to telecast Malayalam films on a weekly basis.

Videocassette players helped some families to watch films during the years when vernacular programmes were scarce on national television. There was a mushrooming of video-parlours in Kerala during this time to enable people to hire and watch films of their choice and at their convenience. Oommen remembers his father, who had an uncompromising antagonism towards films, "seeing part of a film when played on the VCR."[102] Suma also suggests how the videocassette player had changed her exposure to films.

> I told you that my father was very strict about films. So it was only after marriage that I got a freedom to see films and I used it. We were in Kuwait and my husband had membership in a video parlour and could take up to five cassettes at a time. Besides that I was also seeing films with my neighbour or my sister who was staying nearby.[103]

Another 'foreign returnee' Oonnukallil Tom continues to bring home a videocassette on every Friday evening for the family to watch. Until recently Chekkulath Christi too followed a similar practice. What changed this practice for Christi and others is the arrival of cable television.

As it has been suggested a number of times, cable television ushered in as never before the possibility of watching Malayalam films. Ever since that time there has been no dearth of films on television since all Malayalam channels, including that of *Doordarshan*, telecast one or more films everyday. As a result, as I shall discuss further in the next chapter, watching films has become a regular practice for many families.

Cable television, while establishing film viewing as a permanent feature of the families, has reduced two film-related practices, namely, the use of the videocassette player and visits to the cinema. Videocassette players are now hardly used and many video-parlours struggle to survive. Sali sums up the situation when she says, "After taking cable, the use of film cassette has practically stopped. We see films on the

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[102] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[103] Niravath. *Interview*.

cable."[104] In many houses the videocassette recorder/player is dusted only if there has been a recent marriage or funeral because those have become occasions which usually are videotaped. Otherwise, such players have met the fate of the radio: lying around as of no use.[105]

We have observed that many of the Marthomites were not going to the cinema before the arrival of television. This has not changed even after watching films on television. Even a non-Marthomite like Usman who was a regular film-goer has reduced the frequency of his cinema visits with television around. He still goes, only because, "it takes two years for new films to come on TV."[106] The one Marthoma family, among the interview participants, which goes to the cinema occasionally, pointed out that their film-going is basically to compensate for not subscribing to cable television.[107]

A reduction in the number and frequency of people going to the cinema since the arrival of television has been noted elsewhere and therefore is not a matter of surprise.[108] What is surprising about the Marthomites in this study is that even after they began watching films on television their attitude to the cinema remains almost the same as in their pre-television days. The residue of the sanction against cinema and films is lingering among some of the elder members in the family. Neduvellil Susamma repeats to her daughter what her mother told her.

> Now I tell these children 'look, when my mother said it is a sin to go to a theatre it was very difficult for me to accept. Today I won't say that you should not go.' Recently they went to see *Thengasippattanam* or something in the theatre. But again I said 'When you come out from the theatre and others see you just think whether it is appropriate for us who call upon the Lord to be seen coming out of the theatre.' I permitted them to go but asked them to think about it themselves.[109]

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[104] Chekkulath. *Interview*.

[105] Another recent trend is the use of DVDs which became popular in the last two or three years and therefore could not be included in this study.

[106] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

[107] Niravath. *Interview*.

[108] See Lull and Sun. "Agent of Modernization".

[109] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

In other words for many like Susamma and her husband Oommen it is "a shame others seeing us going to a theatre."[110] Abraham, on the other hand, considers even film-viewing on television at home as shameful. He says:

> I don't see many problems in seeing film on TV when compared to going to theatre. Even then if *atchan* comes while I was viewing a film, I would feel bad. It may be true that *atchan* also may see films. But still I will feel like having something forbidden. I feel even now that seeing film is not that good. But I also see.[111]

What is it that makes Abraham nervous about being seen watching a film in his own home or that forces Saramma to consider being seen coming out of the theatre as shameful? In other words the important question here seems to be how a Marthomite accounts for his or her media practice. The above comments show that whether one goes to the cinema or not, film-going is still not considered to be a media practice worthy of a Marthomite.

Despite such reservations concerning cinema or even films, almost all Marthomites in this study watch films on television. Some of them, like Charuvil John justify it by distinguishing film on television from cinema. "When the parents and children sit at home and see a film that does not lead them... [astray]," he argues implying that the domestic context of television is a safeguard from inappropriate programme content, indecent associations and possibility of indulging in immoral behaviour.[112] It is interesting to note that these were some of the reasons to avoid traditional media which shared much with films in India.[113] Some others like Chechamma, acknowledge, however, the contradiction between their prescribed behaviour of abstinence from cinema and the actual practice of watching film on television.

> *S*: But you also see films?
>
> *Chechamma*: (Laughs aloud) O that...did I not say...we are from evil. Bible also says that, isn't it? Our attraction is there for the bad things. It may be because of that that I am not able to control such urge. It is our weakness that we see films.[114]

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[110] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[111] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[112] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[113] See 2.4.1

[114] Chekkulath. *Interview.*

One can dispute what prompts the families to watch films, debating whether it is an attraction or an enjoyment, weakness or temptation. There can also be a debate on what kind of media practice one would want to account for as part of constructing Marthoma identity. But what is not disputed is the growing practice of watching film on television in the Marthoma homes and a growing confidence to talk about film viewing.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter my attempt has been to analyse the introduction of television into the mediascape of the Marthoma homes. I examined the mediascape of the Marthoma Hindu and Muslim families in their pre-television days in the first section, arrival of television in the second and the use of media after the purchase of television in the last section.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that Marthomite mediascape before the arrival of television was strongly inclined towards the use of print, oral and aural media which were in correspondence with their ecclesial and religious culture. What was a stigma for Marthomites (like Muslims) was going to a cinema. Their antipathy towards images and icons may have contributed to their hesitation to use this audio-visual medium and invited severe strictures on a religious basis. By branding film-going as sin or orgy Marthomites (unlike Hindus) wanted to promote an identity devoid of the use of films. However, the arrival of television, another audio-visual medium, has met with a different response.

Marthomites welcomed television. Once exposed to television either on community sets or in the neighbourhood, all families wanted to have a set of their own. I have discussed various reasons that might have prompted such a favourable attitude towards television such as the fascination with the medium and the demand from family members. I have also suggested that the absence of any religious opposition towards television has been significant and that might have made it easier for Marthoma families to purchase a set which was already perceived to be a sign of progress and modern life. Many families, I have shown, wanted a set so much that they, especially the working class families, struggled, borrowed money or even forwent their customary festival dress to procure one. Even with these sacrifices many of them could afford only a black and white second-hand set, another reminder that media use by a family is linked with its material capital.

The arrival of television, I have demonstrated, effectively reorganised the geography of the living room and remapped the media use of the Marthomites in this study. The media use of the Marthomites and other families in their pre-television days when compared with that after the purchase of a television set reveals dramatic changes. With the introduction of television, reading of newspapers is either discontinued or drastically reduced in almost all families. When compared with newspaper, the use of radio is worse. Television, especially cable television, has also made audiocassette players and videocassette players redundant. The marginal use of radio and audiocassette players for many women is exclusively for religious purposes, that is, to listen to and learn devotional songs. In other words, newspaper, radio and cassette player which Marthomites used prominently in the pre-television days are used at present very little and mainly for programmes which are otherwise not available on television. Thus, the newspaper is used for reading obituaries, the radio and cassette player for religious songs.

The altered media practice that television has brought is most visible in the use of films which were previously stigmatised and forbidden. Marthomites, who harboured religious reasons for their opposition to films in their pre-television days and continue to maintain reservations against cinema, have become regular viewers of film on television. They justify using television and watching films on it citing various reasons especially its difference from the cinema in terms of the viewing context.

This chapter in short marks the introduction of television to the selected homes which is something unique to capture because of its recent spread and the welcome accorded to it. How do the Marthomites engage in this new medium, which symbolises a shift from the use of print and audio media to an audio-visual medium, in their homes? This is the question I address in the next chapter to continue the biography of television in the domestic context.

Chapter Five
Television Viewing in Marthoma Families

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated the introduction of television into Marthoma homes. Despite their apprehension of the cinema, Marthomites welcomed an audio-visual medium like television into their domestic mediascape. How do they engage with this medium, which some procured with much difficulty and sacrifice? In other words, do the Marthomites watch television as a family? What are the language preferences in the choice of programmes and why? What are the main prohibitions: which are the programmes that may not be watched at all? These are some of the questions I address in this chapter. By answering these questions I hope to capture what Roger Silverstone has called the "*experience*"[1] of television, which is achieved by prioritising the engagement of the audiences with television and analysing the ways in which they interact and consume it.

In this chapter I suggest that Marthomites consider television to be a family medium and watch it mainly in their leisure time for information and entertainment. Their engagement with television has become an everyday routine practice conditioned by their domestic context and their preference for particular television contents. Though television symbolises new cultural products, I suggest that Marthomites position themselves mostly within their local culture and "socialised gender behaviour"[2] in using this new audio-visual medium. This positioning questions on the one hand some of the fears and stereotyping that exist within media research but reinforces on the other hand gender behaviour, power structure and authority patterns of the households, especially, in times of conflict.

These are discussed in three sections by focussing on the context, contents and conflicts in television viewing. In the first section I analyse the context of television viewing in the families under study. I show that generally Marthomites consider television viewing to be a corporate or collective media practice. It is Marthoma

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[1] Roger Silverstone. 1994. *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge. p. 2

[2] Socialised gender behaviour, as I show later in this chapter, refers to behaviour, especially emotional expressions, internalised and expressed along a gender divide in the domestic context.

"families watching television,"[3] especially in the evenings and weekends. The viewing time and audience composition are determined by the domestic context some of which I identify in this section. It has already been assumed that media consumption takes place in culturally and socially defined contexts.[4] Alongside these cultural and social contexts, my contention, in this section, is to acknowledge the religious context as well.[5]

The focus in the second section is on the contents of television viewing. In this section I discuss the programmes that Marthomites prefer to watch and avoid and their reasons. While what is viewed[6] is largely determined by what is offered by the media industry, I argue that there are specific preferences and avoidances as far as programmes are concerned. What is identified here is a preference for vernacular channels and for news, soaps (serials) and films. Marthomites and other families in this study are identified as having a "home channel,"[7] that is, a channel that they watch for most of the time, with routine excursions to other vernacular channels. Though the reasons for watching certain programmes or channels are ambiguous in certain respects, an analysis of preferences reveals several characteristics which show the mutual influences of television and local culture. Considering that "hedonism" may have played at least a small part in making Marthomites uneasy about traditional media,[8] watching serials and films for entertainment and pleasure I argue is indicative of a remarkable change brought by television. Their preference for vernacular channels challenges some of the assumptions in media research such as the influence of global media on local culture and gender division in television viewing.

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[3] This phrase is adapted from Lull's title. James Lull, ed. 1988. *World Families Watch Television*. Newbury Park: Sage.

[4] Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. 1997. "Introduction: Setting the Agenda". In *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 7

[5] This is not a one way process; we shall see how television viewing is or is feared to be impacting upon work, education and worship in the following chapters.

[6] I do not analyse religious programmes in this chapter, because they will be dealt with separately in Chapter Seven.

[7] I coined, "home channel," resonating "home page", to refer to the preferred channel of the families in this study.

[8] See 2.4.1

In the third section, I focus on the conflicts in television viewing and how they are resolved. As a family activity, television viewing is mostly a consensual practice, but there are occasions when conflicts, especially among the children and along the gender and generational divide, do occur. Television viewing, thus, becomes another arena of decision-making where power is exerted, contested and negotiated in the domestic context. I suggest that even though there are slight shifts in the decision making, as in the case of children selecting the films, the traditional authority patterns across gender and generation are affirmed in television viewing. Conflicts, as and when they occur, are resolved usually within the existing power structure which favours the patriarchal dominance in the family. The handling of the remote control, as in the case of audiences elsewhere, has become another authority symbol in the domestic context.[9]

5.2 Context of viewing

The domestic context of the Marthoma families, like that of others in this study, shapes their engagement with television. In the following discussion, I suggest that they perceive television as a family medium and watch it depending mainly on four contextual factors namely; family composition, nature of adults' work, children's studies and participation in community worship.

5.2.1 Viewing as a family activity

Television by its very audio-visual nature offers the potential and possibility of simultaneous group viewing, unlike a newspaper. However, even such a communal medium can be privatised or individualised with the procurement of separate sets for each member of the house or with technological innovations, as was the case with radio and the walkman. Such a proliferation of television sets resulting in the presence of several sets at home has become the order of the day in some parts of the world. For instance, a survey in 1996 found that in the United Kingdom, 24 percent of the households had an additional set for the children.[10] However this does not

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[9] See David Morley. 1986. *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Comedia. pp. 148–150

[10] ITC Research. 1997. *Television: The Public's View*. London: Independent Television Commission. p. 5. For a research on how the youngsters would watch satellite television in their rooms while their parents watch broadcast television, see Shaun Moores. 1996. *Satellite Television and Everyday Life: Articulating Technology*. London: J. Libbey.

seem to be the case for the Marthomites and for most families in India. It is hard enough to buy the first set, as we have seen in the previous chapter, and to purchase sets for individual family members would be difficult for most.

While it is tempting to suggest that affordability is the overriding reason that prevents the Marthoma families from buying additional sets, it need not be so for everyone. The Oonnukallils, for instance, as mentioned in their family profile, have four television sets, two of which are in working condition.[11] Interestingly, they are not kept separately, say for instance, as in Europe or the U.S. in the children's room or in the kitchen.[12] Instead, the sets are kept together and watched alternatively. This is all the more significant because Samuel, the octogenarian in the family, listens to radio in the mornings, only because he "does not like to get up and go to the veranda to watch television." He could very well have kept one set in his bedroom, but he did not. "We are watching together, so why move them and watch separately?" he comments.[13]

In fact, all the families in this study, irrespective of their religious background, shared this perception of television as a family medium. Watching television is considered to be a collective media practice rather than a solitary activity behind closed doors.[14] As mentioned in the previous chapter, in some houses there may be more than one family to watch television at a given point in time, either from the same household or from the neighbourhood. Even in the nuclear families it is either the whole or part of the family that watch television together. This perception of television as a family medium and the practice of collective viewing have many implications which, as I shall indicate in the following chapters, seems to have made television less threatening for many families when compared with cinema. Collective viewing, however, does create conflicts.

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[11] 3.3 Oonnukallil

[12] Cf. Joseph G. Champ. 2004. ""Couch Potatodom" Reconsidered: The Vogels and the Carsons". In *Media, Home, and Family*, Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane F. Alters. New York: Routledge. pp. 149–150

[13] Oonnukallil Family. *Interview*. 23-06-2001

[14] Elsewhere, for example in the United Kingdom, television viewing is increasingly becoming fragmented where family members are reported to watch the same serial in different parts of the house or individuals watch television behind closed doors. See, David Gauntlett and Annette Hill. 1999. *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge. p. 242, Moores. *Satellite Television and Everyday Life*. pp. 37–38

5.2.2 Viewing television in leisure time

Marthomites and other families in this study reported watching television only in their leisure time. This means that firstly, their television time (leisure time) is determined by other aspects of everyday life and secondly, they have specific slots of time for watching television. Unlike audiences elsewhere, for instance in Serbia, the families in this study claim not to keep television as a secondary activity.[15] They do not watch while doing household chores like ironing or sewing or take an afternoon nap with the television on. In other words they claim to have dedicated time for television and switch it on accordingly.

Thus, most families said they had no time for television in the mornings. The only family that switches their television set on early in the morning is the Charuvils who run a shop in part of their house and have no school children. Since nobody has to go out to work or school in the morning, they, unlike others, can afford to be a bit more relaxed in the mornings. Apart from the Charuvils, the other family that switches on television during a weekday morning is the Chekkulaths where it acts as a 'baby sitter.' Sali says:

> In the mornings we put on television for my son. It is helpful to keep him at home without which he will run out to the road and we have to be on our toes all the time. By this way he will sit at home and other children also will come to watch and we will be able to do our work in the kitchen. For us we will switch TV on only in the afternoon.[16]

In many families, as Sali implied, television time for the adults starts at noon or afternoon when housewives start their viewing. They start either with the news at noon or with the serials in the afternoon depending on the completion of other engagements. Many of them, like the Inchakkalayils, Mullumkuzhys and Neduvellils, sit and watch for about an hour or two. Lilly told her children specifically, "Afternoon is for me and my friends. The rest of the day you watch as you wish."[17] The women watch until around four o'clock and then resume their work making the evening snacks for children and/or cooking the dinner. Children take over

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[15] Maša Vukanovich. The Role of Television in Everyday Life of the Family in Serbia: Paper presented at the Fourth Nordic Conference on the Anthropology of Post-Socialism. http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/V/Vukanovich_M_01.htm. Accessed on Saturday, June 26, 2004 at 17 hrs

[16] Chekkulath Family. *Interview.* 25-05-2001

[17] Kuzhivila Family. *Interview.* 15-05-2001

from their mothers in the afternoon and the audience will increase in the evenings. In short, there is a general pattern in the viewing time and audience grouping. The small children are allowed to watch television in the morning, followed by housewives in the afternoon, school children in the late afternoon and the family in the evenings.

Leisure time, which determines who watches television and when, is conditioned by many factors like the composition of the family and nature of work of its members. For instance, not all housewives in this study are able to watch television in the afternoons. Those of them from the women-only households[18] like the Kottarathils, Karivedakaths, and Edayilyaths do not watch television in the afternoon at all since they have to bear additional responsibilities, usually performed by men, at home. Their increased workload, in comparison with other housewives, leaves them with hardly any time for television in the afternoon. Rosamma explains:

> During the day we do not watch except on rainy days. On those days, once children go to school, *ammachy* [mother-in law][19] and I would be sitting idly at home.[20] Then I will just put it on and see what is there...Otherwise on a normal day I will not be able to sit and watch television. We have a small calf and I have to change it from place to place three, four times so that it can eat the grass. Otherwise I will just walk around the house and things like that. Since their father[21] is not here I have to manage everything. So I do not get time to watch it during the day.[22]

If Rosamma does not get time "except on rainy days," Saramma has time but is tired by the afternoon. "If I want I can watch for an hour or so in the afternoon. But I am tired by that time. Since their father is not here, I have to go for everything...So I lie down and take a nap," she says.[23]

The work at home determines the viewing of women irrespective of whether they work outside the home as well. For the men, however, it is the nature of their work

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[18] Women-only households are those joint families where the old (or widowed) mother and her daughter-in-law are the elders at home as the men are working away and do not live with the family.

[19] In Kerala, Christians address mother-in-law as *ammachy*.

[20] Inchakkalayil Thankachan is another person who rarely views television except on a rainy morning. "All other times I will be engaged and not free," he says, indicating that television viewing is a leisure activity.

[21] Women generally do not call their husbands by name and usually refer to them indirectly as 'their father' or 'him' etc.

[22] Kottarathil Family. *Interview*. 02-06-2001

[23] Edayilyath Family. *Interview*. 28-05-2001

outside the home that shapes their television viewing time. For Arackal Babu and Chekkulath Christy there are "off-days" as they work in a factory and they watch television about two hours in the morning on such days. Unskilled, daily wagers like Mullumkuzhy Baby, Kuzhivila Ponnachan and Muruppel Sam, however, do not have any paid holidays. They do not have much time for television since they work from early morning until late at night and also at the weekends. A self-employed Niravath Philip who runs his own company also said that he had no free time in the evenings. These men, as a result, do not have much time to watch television. The common refrain in many families was that they watch television only when "time permits," that is, during their leisure time.

5.2.3 Viewing television according to the school calendar

In families with school children or college students it is their work (studies), more than the composition of the family and the work of the adults, that determines the television viewing of the whole family. Three different patterns of watching television are recognisable in such families based on the school/college calendar and study habits of the children. Watching television, for them, changes gear with school 'working' days, weekends and vacation.

During school days, irrespective of whether television is switched on or not in the forenoon or afternoon, viewing begins, in many families, with the children returning home from school around half past four. The first thing the children of the Edayilyaths, Kuzhivilas and Punnooreths do on their arrival, their mothers complain, is to switch on the television set and sit in front of it. "They would step in; throw their school bag to one corner and rush to the television. Then they will sit in front of it in their school uniform and watch."[24] The children then watch for an hour or so before playing or doing their homework.

During a normal weekday, none of the families with school-going children in this study watch television for the whole evening. The evenings, especially from half past six or seven, are generally regarded as prime time television assuming, rightly, maximum number of television audiences. The present study reveals, however, that

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[24] Punnooreth Family. *Interview*. 25-06-2001, Edayilyath. *Interview*, Kuzhivila. *Interview*. For a similar practice in the U.S. see Lynn Schofield Clark. 2004. "Being Distinctive in a Mediated Environment: The Ahmeds and the Paytons". In *Media, Home, and Family*, Hoover, Clark and Alters. p. 85

there is no common prime time for the families who took part in the interview. The duration and timing of their television viewing is dictated largely by the study habits of the children. Some families like the Niravaths go to the extreme of not watching television at all on school days whereas some others like the Ottaplackals limit it to less than an hour. Most families, unlike the Niravaths and Oonnukallils do watch television for an hour or two but follow different schedules. The Edayilyaths and Kuzhivilas, for instance, watch from seven to eight o'clock leaving the rest of the evening for the children's study. The Anjilivelils and the Oonnukallils on the other hand switch on television only after nine o'clock, that is, after their children finish their studies. The Mullumkuzhy sisters follow yet another pattern. Mincy explains their on and off pattern:

> We do not see television when we come home from school...We watch television from seven thirty. We watch a serial till eight and then from eight to nine thirty we will study again. After that we watch another serial for half an hour. Then again we study if there is something. In any case TV is off by ten o'clock.[25]

The above comments indicate that television viewing is limited on schooldays. This is not, however, an indication of lack of interest in prime time television but the result of many adults foregoing their wish to watch television for the sake of their children. "We should not do anything that distracts children from their studies," reasons one of them, in a matter-of-fact way.[26] Anjilivelil Kunjamma would have preferred to see a serial daily in the evening at eight. But she watches it only "on Fridays, because children do not have school on Saturdays."[27] If Kunjamma has confined watching the daily serial to one day a week Karivedakath Sheeba, another mother, discontinued it altogether. Sheeba said, at the time of the interview, she watches only what her children are allowed to watch. According to Sheeba:

> I used to see good serials. Now I do not, because children also would come and sit to watch stopping their studies. When they were in small classes and even last year we used to sit and watch them after the evening news. From this year I stopped viewing them. But there is another serial at four o'clock in the evening. The children will be home from school and will be eating at that time. So we will see that.

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[25] Mullumkuzhy Family. *Interview.* 16-05-2001

[26] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[27] Anjilivelil Family. *Interview.* 10-05-2001

> Then we will put it off, only to switch it on again just to hear the evening news.[28]

I will discuss the apparently contradictory perceptions of parents and children on the negative influence of television on the study of children in the next chapter. So, it is sufficient here to mention that Marthomites and other parents in this study restrict their prime time television for the sake of their children. Avoidance of television or its regulated viewing thus becomes another sacrifice that parents make for the sake of their children and their studies. If a family wants to watch the evening news while the children are studying, it is done with maximum care. "My husband and I will watch the news at seven, but we keep the volume down so that it will not disturb the children," says Mini.[29]

The direct link between studying and television viewing becomes all the more clear from the way the regulation on viewing is relaxed during weekends and vacation. Instead of the cautious and restrained viewing during the school week, the duration of watching television increases on Friday nights and viewing starts from the morning on Saturdays itself. It changes gear again with the summer vacation, which provides the children unlimited access to television. "During vacation children see it all the time. They start in the morning from nine to twelve, and then at regular intervals like three thirty, five thirty and seven thirty…it goes on continuously," says Samuel.[30] Family members who restrain their own interests in watching television during school days will also watch more taking advantage of their children's holidays.

Thus, for the school/college-going children and their families, the school calendar and study habits determine the way they watch television at home. It does have much to do with the education system prevailing in Kerala where children have to memorise almost everything for their exam and their evenings are insufficient to do the homework. Especially in families where children are motivated to do well in their exams and to prepare for professional courses, parents take extra care in regulating the television time. In short, the television viewing of the families in this study is

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[28] Karivedakath Family. *Interview*. 30-05-2001

[29] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[30] Oonnukallil. *Interview*.

conditioned to a great extent by their children, and in this sense, television is indeed "paedocratic".[31]

5.2.4 Viewing television after public worship

So far I have been suggesting that the families in this study watch television in their leisure time depending on the family composition and work/study of its members. While this has been a common experience of all the families in this study, irrespective of their religious persuasion, the Marthomites suggested having an additional contextual influence to shape their television viewing. This is their religious context, especially, their attendance in public worship.

The influence of the community religious programmes on television viewing becomes clear from the Sunday schedule of the Marthomites. Television is supposed to get a maximum number of viewers on Sundays, but not many from among the Marthomites, especially in the mornings. For Marthoma families in this study television viewing on Sundays is governed by public worship, cottage prayer meetings, youth meetings and other church related programmes. Hindus and Muslims do not have congregational worship on Sundays; hence it is just a holiday for them. On this day free from work, they may engage in television viewing, whereas for Marthomites it is supposed to be a "holy day" and they are not considered to be free to engage in television viewing. So when Hindu religious serials like *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* were telecast during Sunday mornings, creating unprecedented gatherings before the television sets,[32] there were not many Marthomites among the viewers. Sunday morning is meant for worship for the Marthoma Christians[33] and community worship takes precedence over domestic television viewing. In this sense, the general notion that Sunday morning is prime time television does not reflect the engagement of Marthomites with television.

The Sunday afternoon film at four is also considered to be prime time television because of the large scale audience it attracts. However, it is important to notice that

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[31] John Hartley uses this phrase to "address an image of the audience...governed by childlike qualities." See, John Hartley. 1992. *Tele-ology: Studies in Television*. London: Routledge. p. 17. Here, I use this term to indicate that Marthomites' relationship to television is dominated by its relationship to the children.

[32] See Introduction (i) and 1.3.3 for details.

[33] This does not mean that all the Marthomites would attend Sunday worship without fail. Nobody, however, told me–a priest–that they sit at home to watch television.

many Marthomites continue to attend the cottage prayer on Sunday afternoons missing the film. As Renjan of the Ottaplackal family explains:

> Sunday film is at four. Our prayer group also meets at the same time. Neena and I go for the prayer. If the children stay behind then they may watch the film. Sometimes they also will join us.
>
> *S*: So you will watch television only after you return from the prayer meeting?
>
> *Renjan*: If the film was not finished, I would watch the last bit.[34]

Like Renjan, members of the Neduvellils, Niravaths and Kuzhivilas also will manage to watch only the last part of the film on their return from the cottage prayer. The couples of both the Charuvils and the Oonnukallils, however, would miss the film all together. The prioritisation of the Sunday afternoon cottage prayer meeting over film viewing is significant especially when compared with reports that cadre based political parties are struggling to organise meetings if they clash with the film on Sunday afternoons.

As in the case of Sunday worship and cottage prayer meetings, it is suggested that church programmes for women, youth, choir and Sunday school shape their television viewing. Neduvellil Susamma, for instance, watches an afternoon serial every day, except on Wednesdays when she goes to the women's meeting. Youth members and choir members are also said to go to meetings despite their attraction to films that are shown at the same time and despite the lack of time-shifting devices like video taping. Edayilyath Ashok would watch only part of the Saturday evening film because he attends a youth prayer meeting. Likewise, the children of Niravath would miss the programmes on Saturday when they go to the choir practice. Though questions would need to be asked as to whether there would be new recruits for such meetings, it suffices for the moment to recognise that those who have been active in these religious practices have not discontinued their participation in order to watch television. Community worship continues to take precedence over prime time television.

The priority given to community worship over television viewing is also attested to by the perception that watching television on Sunday mornings is an ungodly act. Unlike some of the previous studies on television audiences which suggested that many audiences feel guilty for watching television, only one of the interview

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[34] Ottaplackal. *Interview*.

participants in the present study has admitted to ever having such a feeling.[35] She (Mullumkuzhy Mini) however, suggested that it was not for watching television but for watching on Sunday mornings that she felt sorry. She waited at home on some Sundays to receive her husband when he returned from his workplace and she watched television during that time:

> *Mini*: I felt guilty when I watched television on Sunday mornings.
>
> *S*: Can you say a bit more?
>
> *Mini*: See, on some Sundays I had to sit at home...Then I watched television but felt bad about it.
>
> *S*: Have you felt guilty at any other time or only on Sundays?
>
> *Mini*: Only on Sundays, not otherwise. On other days we are watching only when we have time. On Sundays I watched television when I ought to have been in the Church.
>
> *S*: Then, what did you do?
>
> *Mini*: I felt bad, but watched. I thought within myself that I was doing something that God may not like. So I prayed for forgiveness.[36]

This perception of prioritising community worship over domestic television underlines the need to recognise the shaping influence of religious context on television viewing among Marthomites.

The discussion in this section points to the influence of the domestic context on the television viewing of the Marthoma and other families in this study. Television viewing is a contextual practice and I have identified some of the contextual factors that influence the way Marthomites watch television in the households. Television viewing, however, is not shaped by the context alone. What is perhaps more important is what is offered on television, and how programmes are perceived.

5.3 Contents of viewing

Television offers round-the-clock programmes with a variety of genres. How do the Marthomites engage with them? What do they prefer and what do they avoid? In this section I discuss their preference for Malayalam channels, the emergence of "home channel," priority for programmes like news, soaps and films. Their avoidance of 'sexy' programmes is also discussed. I suggest, in this section, that Marthomites and

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[35] For example, see Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living*. pp. 119–128. I shall discuss guilt feelings in the next chapter.

[36] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

other families in this study watch television mainly for information and entertainment. Television brings into the domestic context cultural products some of which were not accessed before but in turn are watched in accordance with the cultural moorings of the audiences.

5.3.1 Preference for Malayalam channels

Marthomites and other families in this study watch, almost exclusively, Malayalam channels in spite of having access to more than thirty-five or forty multi-language channels including English, Hindi and the three other South Indian languages- Telugu, Kannada and Tamil. In fact, it is with the advent of Malayalam programmes, brought by cable television, that most families started watching television itself on a daily basis or in a regular manner. When there was only *Doordarshan*, people like Babu, despite having "off days," did not bother to watch television in his leisure time. He explains:

> Now, on my off day, if I do not have any other work I may watch for two hours from 11a.m. That too, after we have taken this cable connection last December. I did not watch *Doordarshan* programmes much because during the daytime it was mainly showing Hindi programmes, which we did not understand.[37]

In the Kuzhivila family, where many families come together to watch television, Lilly and her friends used to sit together and talk in the mornings rather than watch the Hindi programmes. "Neighbours used to come and for some time we sat and talked. Malayalam programmes came only in the afternoon," she says.[38]

The preference for Malayalam channels is for obvious reasons. Firstly, Malayalam is the mother tongue, and secondly, most families in this study are not fluent in any other languages. Even those who are fluent in other languages, however, suggested that their primary choice is Malayalam channels. Some people, for instance Neduvellil Shaila, were counselled by relations to watch *Star* movies and other English language channels to learn English. Many Diaspora Marthomites became more familiar with their parents' language through watching Malayalam films on cable television. Shaila and other Marthomites in this study, however, are yet to use

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[37] Arackal Family. *Interview*. 11-05-2001

[38] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

television as a means of learning another language.[39] "We prefer only Malayalam programmes and do not like other language programmes," declare Mincy and her two sisters.[40]

The preference for the vernacular programmes even by those who know other languages is in line with their perception of language and cultural patterns. Though they learn Hindi and English in schools/colleges and may even use them as part of their work, Malayalam is considered to be the language of home; for conversation, prayer and television.[41] This suggests that Marthomites and other families in this study assign various functions for languages and consider non-Malayalam languages to be part of the outside world. Though they allow the outside world to come into their domestic space through the agency of television, they seem to prefer it to be in a language with which they are comfortable at home.

This overriding preference for Malayalam language programmes defies the national television policy of promoting Hindi as the national language. The families in this study do not appreciate the predominance given to the Hindi language on national television and shun *Doordarshan* in favour of vernacular cable channels.[42] Ashok went to the extreme of saying, "With the advent of Cable television we do not watch the *Doordarshan* channels at all."[43] This raises important questions concerning policy decisions with regard to broadcast media in India.[44]

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[39] Oonnukallil Sherin employed this tactic to watch some Hindi programmes, she revealed. This I shall discuss in the next chapter.

[40] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[41] A similar preference for Malayalam newspapers over English has been mentioned in 4.2.1. Also see, 2.2.4

[42] This is not confined to Kerala alone. For example in the neighbouring states of Tamilnadu and Karnataka too, the use of *Doordarshan* has declined among cable subscribers. See, Srinivas R. Melkote, B. P. Sanjay and Syed Amjad Ahmed. 1998. "Use of STAR TV and Doordarshan in India: An Audience-Centered Case Study of Chennai City". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia: Political, Economic and Cultural Implications*, ed. Srinivas R. Melkote, Peter Shields and Binod C. Agrawal. Lanham: University Press of America, Sandhya Rao and Srinivas R. Melkote. 1998. "Viewing Doordarshan by Cable Subscribers in Bangalore, India: Is There a Difference with Non-Subscribers". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia.*

[43] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[44] For some of the related issues see Andrew Woodfield. 1998. "The Obligation to Provide a Voice for Small Languages: Implications for the Broadcast Media in India". In *International Satellite Broadcasting in South Asia*, ed. Melkote, Shields and Agrawal.

The preference for the vernacular in a multi-lingual country like India also questions the relevance of the media imperialism theory to explain the influence of the globalisation of media on television audiences.[45] One of the fears of the media imperialism theory, that global cultural flow through cable/satellite television would lead to a possible universal linguistic hegemony of English, seems not to be the case with the families in this study.[46] The same is the case with the suspicion of the domination of Hindi over local languages through national television. Such fears appear to be over-reactions considering the ability of the majority of Indians to speak only in the vernacular and their preference for programmes in their mother tongue. The recent announcement of Star-TV of its plan to start a Malayalam channel from 2006 is an acknowledgement, prompted undoubtedly by marketing considerations, of the importance of local culture and language in television viewing by the proponents of globalisation and global media conglomerates themselves.[47]

5.3.1.1 A home channel

The preference for the Malayalam channels is not reflected in the watching of all Malayalam channels available. This study shows that the families under study watch primarily one channel—which I call their home channel—with the occasional excursion to other Malayalam channels. Most of them have *Asianet*, the first Malayalam channel, as their home channel while one family each affirm their loyalty to the *Surya* and *Kairali* channels respectively.

Although the preference for Malayalam channels from among the multi-language channels bears the mark of the influence of local culture on television viewing, the emergence of the home channel is something that many families found difficult to explain. Perhaps this is an indication that media practices can not be fully explained

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[45] Media imperialism theory has generated much literature and debate. For a discussion on the various shades of this theory, see Byron Reeves. 1996. *The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television and New Media Like Real People and Places*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also various contributions in Michael Traber, ed. 1986. *The Myth of the Information Revolution*, London: Sage. UNESCO appointed a commission to make proposals to ensure free flow of information between nations, not just from the developed countries to the two-third worlds. For the report of this commission, known as MacBride's report, see International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. 1980. *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order*. London: Kogan Page.

[46] For a similar observation, see Rao and Melkote. "Viewing Doordarshan By Cable Subscribers in Bangalore, India". p. 202

[47] Deepika. www.deepika.com. Friday, June 18, 2004. Accessed at 17 hrs

and hence are ambiguous. One of the interview participants suggested that the choice of home channel is purely subjective without any rational explanation.[48] Some others, on the other hand, indicated that the perceived political allegiance of a channel, especially in the case of the *Kairali* channel, plays a decisive role in its acceptance or avoidance. For instance Babu watches Kairali for most of the time because of his affiliation to the Marxist Party whereas some others, for instance Gopalan Nair, would hardly watch it because of his antipathy towards the Party.[49] For most families, however, it is by chance rather than by choice that they came to prefer a particular channel.[50]

Whatever the cause of the emergence of the home channel, the families show intense loyalty to it. Despite scores of channels, Shaila and some other Marthomites hardly hop around. "Since all the serials in the *Asianet* channel are good we keep only them. Earlier we used to change channels and see what was in other channels. Now for the last two or three months it is only *Asianet*," she says. [51]

Many others, unlike Shaila, do make excursions to other Malayalam channels. These excursions, however, are fairly routine since the families change channels only for specific programmes at specific times.[52] For instance Soji explains, "In the evenings, during vacation, we watch serials. We watch serial *Sthree* on *Asianet* and then change to *Surya* to watch another, *Malootty*."[53] The Punnooreths have *Asianet* as their home channel but in the evenings, after watching news and a serial they switch to *Surya* to watch the quiz show *Kodeeswaran* and a serial. A few would switch to *Surya* on Sunday mornings exclusively for Christian programmes.[54]

The loyalty to the home channel with routine excursions to other channels is broken only occasionally. Even the breaking of this routine has a routine in the sense that it happens mainly during the weekends to watch films. Bini, an ardent viewer of *Asianet*, is typical of all viewers when she says, "When it comes to films, we look at

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[48] Thenguvila Family. *Interview*. 21-06-2001

[49] Arackal. *Interview*, Suvarna Nivas Family. *Interview*. 24-06-2001

[50] Karivedakath. *Interview*.

[51] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[52] Apart from this they use advertisement time to check what is happening in other channels. This I discuss in the next chapter.

[53] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

[54] I shall discuss the viewing of religious programmes in Chapter Seven.

all channels and keep the good one."[55] What makes a film "good" is something I shall discuss later in this section.

The discussion so far shows that Marthomites and other families in this study watch mostly Malayalam programmes alone and that they have a home channel. While the influence of local culture is visible in terms of their preference for Malayalam channels, the emergence of a home channel is ambiguous and difficult to explain except to suggest that their loyalty to particular channels makes television viewing a routine practice. It also shows perhaps a conservative mindset which does not encourage hopping around various channels but sticks with channels/programmes that they like.

5.3.2 Preference for news, soaps and films

The ambiguity in the emergence of a home channel may suggest that questions on viewing and preferences generate more guesses and imaginative predictions than tangible answers because viewing is complex, reasons are assumed and measurements are elusive. For instance, each family member may have his/her own preference of programmes. The different and overlapping preferences expressed by audiences within and across gender and generational divides make any identification of preferred programmes more complicated. While accepting this complexity and ambiguity in television viewing, it is still my contention that there is a recognisable pattern in what they watch and what they avoid. What they watch and avoid reveals on the one hand the cultural tastes of the families and on the other hand contributes to the emergence of television viewing as a routine domestic practice in the households. I analyse below the major programmes that the families said they watch, that is news, soaps and films, and the programmes they avoid, that is, perhaps ones with sexually explicit scenes.

5.3.2.1 Viewing news

Though the families in this study spoke of a decline in reading newspapers and listening to the radio when television entered their households,[56] news remains an important item of television viewing. Television, in other words, has become the main source of information, especially of national and international news.

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[55] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[56] 4.4.1, 4.4.2.

Watching television news has become a marker point and important part of the everyday life of the families. As mentioned earlier, in some families television viewing begins with the news at noon and in other families the evening news is a fixed item. In one Hindu family, in order to watch the news, the parents would even ask their children to recite their prayer-song softly.[57] In another family, on the other hand, the parents would watch the news at a low volume to avoid disturbing their children in their studies.[58] All the families that participated in the interview spoke of watching news once or twice a day and some of the elders like those in the Edayilyath, Karivedakath, Muruppel and Valiyaveettil families said that they watch television mainly for news.

Uthaman Nair stated the obvious reason for watching news on television, "You can hear news over radio or read it in the paper but if you want to see, you need television and that is why it is important."[59] By providing the possibility of seeing "what is happening" in the world, television news is considered to be helpful in making sense of the everyday world. As Deenamma argues:

> I tell the boys to put the news on. It is to know what is happening around.
>
> *S*: Why do you want to know?
>
> *Deenamma*: Don't we have to know what is happening in our country?[60]

Most of the families cited the importance of recent news or current affairs as the reason for watching the news. For instance:

> *Chacko*: We can see news from all over the country and in detail...This week we saw the swearing-in-ceremony of the new State cabinet without going up to Thiruvananthapuram.
>
> *Ponnammma*: When there was the earthquake, we were sitting here and watching as if we were there and then itself.[61]

While Chacko pointed to the spatial proximity that television news provides and his wife cited the chronological proximity to the action, Susamma went one step further

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[57] I shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter Seven.

[58] See 5.2.3

[59] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

[60] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[61] Charuvil. *Interview.*

to acknowledge that through television, "One can see more than those who are physically present," at the site.[62]

Television news, in short, is credited with showing events as they take place. On a day to day basis television provides an opportunity to be in touch with world events and this becomes important for many families especially since their relatives are working outside Kerala, in the gulf and in western countries like the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. The preference for "news from all around the world,"[63] as Bini indicates, is not only helpful to "keep in touch,"[64] with the wider world, but also to be assured of the world of their dear ones.

Adult men and women in this study watch news defying the earlier suggestion of some media researchers that women consider watching news a masculine activity.[65] Watching news, however, demonstrates a generational divide. While some of the elders are nearly news-only-viewers, their grandchildren are not keen on watching news. Deenamma, as we have seen in an earlier quote, tells "the boys to put the news on," and they did. They and other children in this study, however, did not talk of making any concerted effort to watch news on their own, though they may watch it when it comes between their preferred programmes or as part of the family audience. Their lack of enthusiasm for television news except in times of general elections or earthquakes is in line with their newspaper reading habit and reflects, perhaps, a notion that news is related to the adult world.

5.3.2.2 Viewing soaps

There is no gender or generational divide when it comes to one of the new cultural products brought by television to the whole family, that is, soaps. An analysis of watching serials reveals three important characteristics of the families in this study, some of which modify the earlier conception of media researchers with regard to the gender division in watching serials.

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[62] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[63] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[64] Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living.* p. 54

[65] See for example, Dorothy Hobson. 1980. "Housewives and the Mass Media". In *Culture, Media, Language: Working papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson. pp.109–110

Firstly, watching serials has become an important attraction of television and a source of entertainment for the whole family.[66] When compared with other programmes it is on serials that the families spent most of their television time. "We watch serials because in the evenings we are at home and generally we do not have much work. So everybody would sit together and once watched a serial, got interested in the story and began to watch regularly," says Ammini on the routine and emergence of watching serials.[67] "Serial is an enjoyment, what else?" comments Kunjumol.[68] In this sense, serials have made the domestic context more enjoyable, filling an otherwise "idle time."[69] Considering the lack of entertainment outside the home and the prohibition against going to the cinema, serials have become one of the few entertainments for most of the families.[70]

All the families acknowledged that they watch serials for entertainment. They also gave illustrations of the processes through which pleasure is generated[71] and sustained such as the scope for an imaginary identification with the life and the world of the characters.[72] Serials are preferred, they explained, because of the portrayal of life-like stories of families, their struggles, sorrows and more importantly their happy endings.

Following the characters who provide scope for "being moved" by their sorrows and happiness and hoping for a happy ending to their sorrowful life, the families in this

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[66] For a discussion on the 'edutainment' value of soap operas, see Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers. 1989. "Prosocial Television for Development in India". In *Public Communication Campaigns*, ed. R. E. Rice and C. Atkins. Beverly Hills: Sage.

[67] Punnooreth. *Interview.*

[68] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[69] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[70] For a suggestion on how broadcasting increases the attractiveness of the home as a site for leisure see Simon Frith. 1983. "The Pleasures of the Hearth". In *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. J. Donald. London: Routledge.

[71] Pleasure is generated, as Ang has pointed out, in the "interaction between the serials and the viewers" and the difference in response is because of the audiences and their background. Ang discusses various processes that make a product pleasurable. Ien Ang. 1989. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge. p. 10

[72] See Ang. *Watching Dallas*. p. 29. However the women that I talked to would identify only with the sufferings on screen. They distanced themselves from the bold and courageous portrayals of women. Kottarathil Kunjumol, for instance, suggests that "not everybody get such ability," to indicate that women should not aim at such qualities and instead be content with what they are. For a suggestion that women especially in the third world distance themselves from the "unrealistic" world of the media in another context, see Minu Lee and Chong Heup Cho. 1990. "Women Watching Together: An Ethnographic Study of Korean Soap Opera Fans in the US". *Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1.

study keep watching the serials day after day. Their anxiety or curiosity is fuelled further by the suspense with which every episode ends, compelling them not to miss the next episode. When the story becomes so gripping, one of the interview participants would offer a word of prayer, seeking God's intervention in preventing the Electricity Board from enforcing a power cut during the serial time on the following day.[73] It is with such anxiety and anticipation that some people watch serials.

Secondly, the decision to watch a particular serial is influenced mainly by the interpersonal network. Susamma, for instance, recalls in the following narrative how she began to watch a popular serial.

> It is in fact *Sthree* serial that made us sit in front of the television especially for the serials. Before that we hardly had seen any serials. When we went somewhere and saw one episode we got an interest. Then someone told us the story and since then we have been permanent viewers.[74]

As in Susamma's case, most families watch serials by chance or as a result of "viewing from the beginning" as the Mullumkuzhys suggested.[75] Many had stumbled upon the serials while peers led some others to them.

Thirdly, the interview participants watch serials, especially the evening serials, mostly as a family. They do not consider it an isolated, degraded or gendered activity for only some of the family members. An affirmation of watching serials and an appreciation of them without gender or generational differences in most families indicate that the families in this study do not categorise soaps as woman's exclusive domain. In this sense, this study shows, like some others,[76] a break down of the "polarised distinctions"[77] of television programmes into masculine and feminine that some media scholars proposed.[78] Although a few of the men and male children still

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[73] Punnooreth. *Interview.*

[74] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[75] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[76] Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living.* p. 285

[77] Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living.* p. 285

[78] See for example, James Lull. 1988. "Constructing Rituals of Extension Through Family Television Viewing". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 248, Morley. 1986. *Family Television.* For a critique of Morley and some other scholars who differentiated programmes into masculine and feminine, see Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living.* pp. 285–86. David Morley takes issue with Gauntlett and Hill to suggest that it is the lack of working class families, and also of women with small children in their sample that led them to assume the decline of gender

echo the conception that watching serials is women's activity, they do not shy away from watching them on their own and there are other men in this study who are staunch fans of serials.

The present study, however, shows that the gender divide comes into play in the emotional responses to the programmes like serials and films, if not in their selection. Almost all the men and male children suggested that they keep a distance in terms of their emotional involvement in the serials. Women, on the other hand, said that they are often emotionally moved by the serials.

The difference in the approach of men and women to serials is evident in the following exchange.

> *Chacko*: (Laughs) They show the serial as if it is real and hence sometimes she sits and cries with it.
>
> *S*: What type of scenes make you cry?
>
> *Ponnamma*: That which pains us...like cheating. Even in real life when others cheat and deceive someone I feel like crying.
>
> *Chacko*: When deception and cheating comes, I will tell her that these are *kallakkatha*[79] and not to cry.[80]

Chacko considers that it is the inability to distinguish between real and make-believe stories, the absence of critical distance, which makes his wife cry when watching television. By distinguishing television stories and "real life" happenings Ponnamma, did indicate her knowledge of the difference between fiction and factual stories. Still Ponnamma and other women feel sorrow when seeing deception and cheating in the serials. "When there is cheating and deception...especially from friends...it makes me sorrowful," says Rosamma.[81] The Kuzhivila Girls said candidly that they cry when they see these and other scenes of ill treatment and suffering. Their emotional journey, though, is not confined to tearful scenes alone. The women and girls said that they feel happy when there is peaceful resolution of conflicts or a happy ending

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distinctions in watching television. See, David Morley. 2000. *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London: Routledge. pp. 286–287. Despite the obvious presence of both the above categories, i.e. working class families and women with children, in my research I support Gauntlett and Hill's observation on the breaking down of polarised distinctions. I agree with Morley, however, that the gender divisions continue, especially as I argue shortly, in the emotional responses to the programmes if not in their selection.

[79] Fiction (fabricated) stories that should not be believed.

[80] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[81] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

to a miserable life in the serials. "I feel happy when, for example, an innocent person was acquitted in the end," recalls Rosamma.[82]

Men and boys took a different posture from that of women and girls in describing their emotional responses to television programmes which, in fact, was somewhat contradictory and ambiguous. Some men, Muruppel Sam for instance, adopted a stoical position in denying any need to involve emotionally in television stories at all. He is of the opinion that:

> What we see in television is not what we see in real life. That is only what film people act for the general public. So one need not bother much about what is shown in television. It is just to pass the time. They are acting to get money. And they are acting for the people. We do not have to take action or feel tense through watching that. That is for me.
>
> *S*: But sometimes don't we feel happy watching something?
>
> *Sam*: As far as TV is concerned there is nothing to feel happy or sad. That is just to pass the time. That is all.[83]

Sam does not watch serials regularly and he was not asked to explain the dynamics of watching without any feelings involved. Most of the men and boys, unlike Sam, did not mind acknowledging happiness in responding to television portrayals but evaded a direct response when questioned about tearful scenes. Biju, for instance, said that he felt happy with a serial "when the girl who suffered a lot was married in the end to a rich house."[84] The following exchange illustrates his reluctance to answer about sad scenes.

> *S*: Had she not been married to a rich family would you have felt bad?
>
> *Biju*: Why should I feel sorry? They are acting it to get money.
>
> *S*: Then why did you feel happy when she was married into a rich house.
>
> *Biju*: I am not watching it, I watch only once in a while. (Others laugh)[85]

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[82] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[83] Muruppel. *Interview.*

[84] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[85] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

While Biju tried to avoid the question, rather unsuccessfully, Chacko, who advises his wife that serials are *kallakkatha,* sensed the possible contradictions in his reply to a similar question and evaded it with a laugh.

> *S*: Have you ever felt crying on seeing any thing on television?
>
> *Chacko*: No
>
> *S*: Don't you feel happiness also?
>
> *Chacko*: (Laughs)[86]

Such evasive and ambiguous responses from men and boys on the one hand,[87] and the emotional expressions of women despite knowing that serials are fiction on the other, show that each watch television with their socialised notions of gender behaviour irrespective of having an objective or critical distance.

Critical distance is considered to be the ability to discern a product of fiction as such and to have a distanced appreciation. In fact the lack of this 'distancing' is cited as the reason for many viewers, especially women, having expressive emotional reactions to serials or films needing a reminder that they are *kallakkatha*. The present study, however, shows that this explanation is insufficient to account for the varying emotional response of the audience to serials, especially the contradictory response of men to happy and weepy scenes. From this study, I suggest that, it is the cultural notions of gender and public expression of emotions, rather than the possession of critical distance, which becomes evident in their engagement with television. In a culture where public expression of sorrow is permitted or even expected from women, it may not require much courage for them to describe their emotional journey along with the characters in the serials or films. Men, however, are socialised not to exhibit grief or tears publicly and this cultural conditioning may put pressure on them to suppress their sorrow or to say that they are unaffected. Men, in line with their socialised behaviour, can express heroism and happiness in public, but should hide pain and tears. In short, watching serials by the whole family for entertainment and pleasure, blurs on the one hand the distinction between masculine and feminine programmes, but reinforces on the other hand the culturally conditioned gender behaviour.

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[86] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[87] For the refusal of men to be open about their emotions, see also John Fiske. 1987. *Television Culture*. London: Methuen. p. 78, Dorothy Hobson. 1982. *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen. p. 110

5.3.2.5 Viewing films

Apart from gender distinctions what was clear with regard to films was the generational divide in the families under study. While many of the elder women are not keen on watching films, their grandchildren are just the opposite. The younger generation shows greater knowledge of film, indicative of the freedom and opportunity they have to watch and talk about films, which in itself, is a sign of a culture shift in the Marthoma households.

Unsurprisingly, children take the decisions on films rather than their parents or grandparents.[88] "It is the children who keep the films on," says Saramma.[89] "We look into the newspaper and decide. *Pappa* and *Amma*[90] do not know which film is good and they are not keen viewers either," affirms Shaila.[91] Unlike serials, films are telecast on television only a year or two after their release and by that time there will be a wide ranging discourse[92] about them. This would be in the form of trailers, advertisements and reviews on television or in other media, and opinions of the social group who had been to the cinema. Though children make use of this media discourse, they rely more on the social network of interpersonal communication in their decision making on films, as their elders do with serials. For instance, Soji asks her cousins "who go to movies" for advice on which film to watch.[93] Valiyaveettil Salofar consults his friends while coming from the Mosque on Sundays. Some others like Molly, however, do not consult anybody because she believes that "cable operators generally broadcast family films" making all television films suitable for the family to watch.[94]

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[88] In the United States, on the contrary, there are families where "the kids never select a movie on their own." See Lee Hood. 2004. "Fitting with the Media: The Price-Benoits and the Franzes". In *Media, Home, and Family*, Hoover, Clark and Alters. p. 134

[89] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[90] i.e. Mother

[91] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[92] Hoover categorises Media discourse into discourse in, of and about media. See Stewart M. Hoover. 1998. "Religion, Media, and the Cultural Center of Gravity". http://www.colorado.edu/Journalism/MEDIALYF/analysis/umcom.html. Accessed on Friday, March 02, 2001 at 16 hrs. What I denote here is not just confined to what appears in the media itself but also in personal networks. For a later development of the concept of discourse into "accounts of media," see Hoover, Clark and Alters. *Media, Home, and Family.*

[93] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[94] Muruppel. *Interview.*

Generally, the children select new, colour and fast-paced films, another feature perhaps of the modern world and culture they find attractive and want to stay in touch with. If an old or black and white film is listed in one of the channels then the decision-making becomes that much easier. "We watch only colour and new films. In some channels there will be old films which we will not look at," declares Ashok.[95]

From among the new and colour films there are further preferences. The over-riding preference in almost all the families in this study is for "family film" or *kudumbachithram*,[96] a precondition reflective of the collective viewing at home. Since films are watched for entertainment serious stories or those which make one tense or cry are not preferred, as suggested in the following exchange:

> *Molly*: If it is a political or serious film, we have to endure severe tension.
>
> *S*: So you don't like seeing films that make you tense?
>
> *Molly*: No, I don't like such films. Maybe because I feel crying when I see their acting.
>
> *S*: Do you feel sad when seeing a film?
>
> *Molly*: Yeah, I cry when seeing some of the films.[97]

Molly has company in Vijayamma and others who, given a chance, would never watch a tragic film. "Say, for instance *Kireedam*, the one in which Mohanlal dies in the end. If it is listed, then I would say, 'Oh don't keep it. I don't like Mohanlal dying in the end'" she says with a laugh.[98]

Comedy is preferred to tragedy. A conception of linking entertainment with happiness explains the lower preference for serious and tragic films among the family audiences. Since films are viewed in order to laugh rather than to cry, comedy films have high preference in almost all families in this study. "If it is a comedy then we can laugh and enjoy," reasons Molly.[99] "What a noise would it be at that time with loud and unrestrained laughter," recalls Vijayamma on watching comedy films.

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[95] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[96] Many films are advertised as *Kudumbachithram* to target a family audience.

[97] Muruppel. *Interview*.

[98] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview*.

[99] Muruppel. *Interview*.

The preference for news, serials and films does not mean that the families refrain from watching other programmes on television. Children do watch cartoons in the evenings whereas their parents also join in when they watch programmes about the planet, nature and animals. Another programme which attracts viewers is the telecast of cricket matches. However, watching such programmes is marginal and occasional when compared with the regular diet of news, serials and films.

The above discussion suggests that Marthomites and other families have specific preferences regarding programmes on television and they use television mostly for information and entertainment. As I shall suggest again in the concluding chapter, family entertainment, especially watching soaps and films, is a unique contribution of television to the Marthoma families.

5.3.3 Avoidance of Programmes

While Marthomites prefer to watch certain Malayalam programmes on particular channels it is obvious that they avoid some other programmes. Most of the elders in this study, unlike elsewhere such as Britain, said that they generally refrain from watching much of what appears on television.[100] They cited physical ailment and a lack of interest as the main reasons for avoiding "too much television" but it remains for further research to see whether a lingering shadow of the earlier prohibition of visuals behind this lack of interest. It may also be that they do not consider television to be part of their everyday life since they did not grow up watching television. Whatever the reason, they do not perceive or use television as a companion in their old age.

While the elders avoid many programmes, what all members avoid in all programmes, especially in films, are immodest dress, indecent costume or kissing and rape scenes. Intimate physical contact and sex scenes are generally not shown on Malayalam channels. This confidence in the suitability of television content for the family audience seems to be one thing that made television acceptable to the households. It is the case that anything which can be construed as sexual or revealing is deplored and avoided. One of the reasons for watching a serial, it is suggested, is

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[100] See Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living*. p. 40

its apparently clean nature without any sex or indecent exposure. "The fashion channel is banned here," says Abraham, because it is "unsuitable".[101]

It is interesting to report that none of the families in this study was explicit in answering the question about what they prefer to avoid. The word "sex" itself was not mentioned by many families and expressions like "*cheetha*",[102] "bad", "vulgar", "unsuitable", were used in a "you-know-what" mode. As a result many had to be asked specifically whether they were referring to "sexy scenes."[103]

The only concern of the parents is that their children should avoid seeing sex-related programmes. They are happy to note that there is no need to give any specific instruction on what to do when "it" comes and they commend the children on "self-policing".[104] "Sometimes when everybody is watching together, if it comes, they would go," explains Usman.[105] Suma announced proudly that her children "change the channel on their own," when inappropriate scenes come.[106] According to Renjan, one of the advantages of collective viewing is the possibility of such censorship. When family members, especially children watch together there is no need to instruct what not to watch, he commented, indicating that the cultural notions of what is suitable for a family or siblings will act as a guide in such situations. Discipline and trust are thus evoked or implied when it comes to programme selection with the belief that the parents have inculcated the cultural values and norms of decent behaviour. The parents take it for granted that the children have the right foundations of their value system to help guide them in their choices or at least in avoiding some.

The above discussion on the contents of viewing/avoiding in this section shows that Marthomites and other families in this study have a well crafted, conscious and

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[101] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[102] This is in line with the general reluctance to speak about sex or sex organs publicly or say their names.

[103] As it is not considered a matter of public discussion, there was difficulty in exploring this question, which is partly due to my "priesthood" and the presence of family members as a whole. This is the limitation of conducting interviews with the whole family at one time. Even otherwise, questions on sex-scenes would have been a very sensitive area to explore.

[104] Hood. "Fitting with the Media". p. 143

[105] Thenguvila. *Interview.*

[106] Niravath. *Interview.*

routine television viewing.[107] The preference for Malayalam programmes and Malayalam channels shows the influence of local culture in television viewing. The reasons for watching programmes like news, soaps, and films, among other things, suggest that Marthomites use television as a window to the world and a medium of entertainment. In this sense, television seems to combine in itself the functions of various media like newspaper, radio and films. As I shall discuss in the concluding chapter, this may perhaps partly explain the decline in the use of other media at home since the arrival of television. Again, it may also suggest that Marthomites did not welcome television on the prospect of seeing films alone. In their selection and avoidance of programmes and especially in their response to them, the families exhibit their cultural tastes across generations, notions of morality and socialisation of gender behaviour. They watch television programmes, in short, positioning themselves within their local culture, and television viewing becomes another way of reinforcing, with a slight shift, their cultural identity.

5.4 Conflicts and viewing television

So far I have been suggesting that the Marthomites and other families in this study follow a pattern in viewing television, mostly shaped by their social context, religious affiliation and cultural conditioning. However, during the course of the discussion I have also indicated the possibility of conflicts in watching television. Though collective viewing and a common television set contribute to an accepted and consented viewing schedule, it is not always a smooth, mechanical, non-contested and pleasant affair. At least at times the Marthoma families, like other families in this study and elsewhere,[108] experience conflicts or even "living room wars"[109] in watching television. As I show below television viewing has become occasions for careful scheming, pious manipulations, bribe, reinforcement of patriarchal authority and even physical violence. Such conflicts are usually resolved,

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[107] For a similar observation about television audiences in the U.S. context, see Champ. ""Couch Potatodom" Reconsidered". p. 148

[108] Morley. *Family Television*, Gauntlett and Hill. *TV Living*. p. 49

[109] Ang uses this phrase to indicate the competition the television producers are engaged in for audiences. Ien Ang. 1996. *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. London: Routledge. I use the phrase to indicate the conflict among members of the audience over television.

I suggest, within the "politics of the living room"[110] which favours patriarchy most of the time.

The nature of the conflict and its resolution assume different proportions depending on the players involved. As I shall discuss in detail below, the dispute over watching television among siblings can end up in physical violence irrespective of their gender whereas conflicts among couples result usually in the withdrawal of the women. The preference of women prevails usually when they are alone.

In one family in this study, however, the scope for the resolution of conflict is rare. It is because in this family, that is the Mullumkuzhys, the three girls take decisions in a democratic way and in conflict situations majority opinion prevails. In some other families, for instance the Edayilyaths, it is the possession of the remote control rather than majority opinion that becomes decisive in programme selection. "Whoever comes home first from school would keep the remote control and his preference will prevail during the evening programmes," says Ashok.[111] As a result each of the brothers tries to reach home before the other from church on Sundays because of the evening film.

Such scheming takes the form of bribes among certain siblings. For instance Biju confessed to bribing his sister by giving her *chambakka*[112] plucked from their neighbour's plant to keep his choice of channel.[113] Sometimes such scheming and bribing work but other times they do not, resulting in rough and tumble among the siblings. In Edayilyath, the boys would "not beat but shout at each other,"[114] whereas in Punnooreth the conflict was conducted in "boxing style." "Once or twice when the boys quarrelled over remote control they punched each other as they see on TV, their lips were cut and blood was coming," laments Ammini.[115]

When children squabble over television, parents intervene. Kuzhivila Lilly will take a stick and the girls go into hiding, Punnooreth Ammini would scold, lament and cry.

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[110] Sean Cubitt. 1984. "Top of the Pops: The Politics of the Living Room". In *Television Mythologies: Stars, Shows and Signs*, ed. Len Masterman. London: Comedia. p. 46

[111] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[112] A type of fruit.

[113] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[114] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[115] Punnooreth. *Interview.*

Edayilyath Saramma would shout. While the adjudication in each family is different, what is common is the parental intervention, as at other times, when children dispute over television. In this way the conflicts among siblings over television viewing reinforce the parental authority in the household.

When the conflict, however, is between parents and children or between the couples, there is no scope for external intervention. Children do not clash openly with their fathers as they do with their mothers, but they persuade him to change the channel. In return the father is said to compromise with his children. Such diplomacy and compromise evaporate however when it comes to couples where the husband asserts his right over his wife to view what he wishes. Like many women in this study, Beena suggests, in the following exchange, that it is unthinkable to clash with her husband when it comes to television and she would always withdraw for the sake of peace at home.

> *S*: When Beena wants to see the serial and at the same time there is another programme, say an interview that Babu wants to see, what would you do?
>
> *Beena*: Oh My! *Aiyyo*!!! (Laughs)
>
> *Babu*: If I am here, I will keep the interview on. I will tell them not to watch the serial on that day.
>
> *S*: Then would you change the channel?
>
> *Beena*: I would not. Why should I create trouble? I would let it go.
>
> *S*: Have you ever tried?
>
> *Beena*: No. Because if the remote control is in his lap, I would decide to watch the serial only on the following day. Why should I create a problem for him and the children? So I have not attempted to change it. I know which programmes he likes.[116]

Beena would know by the very placement of the remote control whether there is any possibility of negotiation. If it is "in his lap" then she would not venture to start "trouble". The remote control is one object that plays a symbolic role in this power struggle. For those families where there is a remote control, it is usually in the possession of the father or the children, indicating again the power dynamic in the domestic context. The remote control is "controlled" by women only when they are alone or with their mother-in-law or young child.[117]

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[116] Arackal. *Interview*.

[117] See Morley. *Family Television*. pp. 36–39

The conflicts over television and their resolution suggest once again that television reinforces the authority pattern within the households. Television viewing has become another practice where parental and patriarchal control are replayed and reinforced.

5.5 Conclusion

The attempt in this chapter has been to understand and analyse the television viewing in the Marthoma homes. I have discussed the various ways or processes through which, Marthomites and other families in this study engage with television by addressing five inter-related "W" questions: Who watches television and when? What are the programmes watched and why? Who takes the decisions on watching?[118]

As a whole, the discussion in this chapter shows that television viewing in the Marthoma homes has emerged as a routine, everyday, family practice shaped mainly by their social, religious and cultural identity. Marthomites claim to watch television during their leisure time depending on various contextual factors like family composition, nature of work/study of the family members and community worship. While the role of public worship in shaping television viewing is unique for Marthomites, the influence of the local culture is evident in all families, irrespective of their religious differences. Their preference for Malayalam channels and programmes, choice of programmes,[119] shared notions of what is viewable or not, and emotional expressions along the gender divide to programmes, among other things, suggest that the families in this study watch television and the new cultural products like soaps and films in conformity with their cultural identity and socialised gender behaviour in the domestic context. The shaping influence of cultural identity in media consumption, it is pointed out, raises questions about the media or cultural imperialism theory. This study also adds voice, it is pointed out, against the

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[118] It is only coincidence that these questions, in part, resemble Harold Lasswell's model of mass communication—who says what in which channel to whom with what effect—because I do not share his emphasis on communication as a transmission of message from sender to receiver. I have already indicated my perspective of communication as "construction of meaning" acknowledging the meaning making activity of the audience rather than receiving passively what is transmitted. For Lasswell's and other models of communication, see Denis McQuail. 1981. *Communication Models*. New York: Longman Inc.

[119] Religious background does not influence the choice, whether it is news, songs or films, except when it comes to religious programmes. This difference, I will discuss in Chapter Seven.

stereotyping of television programmes into masculine and feminine and suggests that gender difference comes into play in accounting for the emotional responses to the programmes rather than in their selection. Such differences in emotional response reveal other traits of their cultural identity in the form of socialised gender behaviour.

Although the cultural and religious identity of the Marthomites helps them to have an "intentional and sophisticated"[120] pattern of watching television programmes such as news, soaps and films for information and entertainment, their engagement with television also has its share of ambiguity and conflicts. The ambiguity reveals the inability to rationally explain all experiences of television viewing as exemplified in the emergence of the home channel and in the preference for certain programmes over others. The conflicts on the other hand, are due to the collective viewing and the difference in preferences among family members and across gender and generational divides. Like many other collective family practices, television viewing is shown to be a site of power negotiation in the domestic context. Though television brings in a new power group in the form of children by way of their superior knowledge about films, the decision-making and conflict resolution, as at other times, generally favours the patriarchal power structure and parental authority in the households.

The Marthoma and other families in this study, in short, have incorporated television viewing into their domestic context as one of their daily practices. They do not watch television casually or occasionally but in a patterned, daily and regular manner. The pattern is visible not only in the constitution of the audience, viewing time, selection and avoidance of programmes but also in the decision making process as well. They switch on the television at specific times, for specific programmes, on specific channels with a fixed audience grouping.

If television viewing has become an every day domestic practice, it may have its influence on other practices in the domestic context. In the following chapters I shall discuss the influence of television viewing on family life, social practices and religious rituals.

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[120] Borrowed from Champ. ""Couch Potatodom" Reconsidered". p. 169

Chapter Six
Watching Television and the Practices of Everyday Life

6.1 Introduction

In the last two chapters my focus has been on the arrival of television and the emergence of television viewing as a domestic everyday practice among the families in this study. I have demonstrated that Marthomites and other families welcome television into their households and engage with it. In other words, the focus so far has been on what Marthomites do with television. In the present and the following chapters, I change this focus by exploring the other side of the question, that is, what television does to the families? What is the influence of television viewing on the everyday lives of the Marthoma families? Does their apparently leisure time activity of watching television influence their practices, including their domestic communication, social networking and religious practices? Has television viewing become a routine domestic practice at the expense of other practices at home or has it been accommodated and adapted into the domestic context without replacing or reducing them? In short, how far does television influence the everyday life of the Marthomites?

If the everyday personal, interpersonal, social and religious practices of the families play a role in shaping their television viewing, as I have shown in the previous chapters, it is imperative to analyse how they in turn are being influenced by the use of television. Only such an exploration will provide a more complete account of the experience with television in the households. What is acknowledged here is the possibility of a complex interaction and multilateral influence between everyday practices (including television viewing) rather than a unilateral or unidirectional impact of any one practice upon another. Again, the influence of television may not be uniform upon all domestic practices nor among all families. There might even be different perceptions regarding its influence within certain families themselves indicating again, varying levels of reception among television audiences.

Each day of life is inclusive of various practices and in this chapter I discuss the influence of television on some of the everyday personal, interpersonal and group practices and I argue that Marthoma families have accommodated and domesticated television in their homes with minimum disturbance to most of their everyday

practices. This I consider television viewing in relation to practices like sleeping, eating, purchasing, chatting, studying, working, visiting and playing.

It should to be emphasised, however, that I am not attempting an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of domestic life in their relation to television. For instance, practices like dressing, decorating, designing, mating and imagining may become conspicuous by their absence in this analysis. It is also necessary to underline that separation of daily practices into various categories is only for the sake of analysis and that the boundaries are not always distinct between many of them. Praying, which is another important part of the everyday life of the families in this study is discussed as part of the interaction between television and religion, in the next chapter.

6.2 Sleeping

Has television brought any change to their sleep? Do they sleep and wake as in their pre-television days? The families in this study generally gave the impression that television has not brought any radical change in their sleeping. While some families are unaffected, others do not loose sleep over the slight reduction in their sleeping time.

For the Karivedakaths, Mullumkuzhys, Niravaths and Suvarna Nivas, television is inconsequential as far as their sleep is concerned. They go to bed and wake up at the same time as in their pre-television days. Other families, however, sleep later than before. The delay is minimal for the Muruppels, that is, half an hour, and maximum for the Charuvils, that is, one and a half hours. The rest of the families mostly go to sleep an hour later than before. The Anjlivelils, for instance, used to be in bed by nine, now they go to bed by ten. The Kuzhivilas shifted their bed time from ten to eleven. Normally, all the families are asleep before midnight and wake up before seven in the morning.

The delay in bedtime means a corresponding reduction in their sleeping time because television viewing postpones only the bed time. The family members, especially the adults, wake up at the same time as in their pre-television days. "Even after we stop watching television, my husband will continue till about half past eleven or twelve. Even then he would get up by five in the morning," says Sally.[1] This reduction in sleeping, however, is not considered to be much of a problem. The Muruppels

[1] Chekkulath Family. *Interview*. 25-05-2001

"would have delayed it further but for the fear of having headache from late viewing," says Dolly.[2]

Instead of blaming television for reducing their sleep, many families, in fact, consider television to be a help in avoiding going to bed too early. The Pulloli family is unusual in that they speak of one of the benefits of television being that they can sit and watch until they really want to sleep.

> *Sreedevi*: Otherwise how to spend time till we sleep? Now we can see something till ten o'clock.
>
> *Thankappan*: If we go to bed before ten we will not feel sleepy. It would also be difficult to sleep through the night. Now if we watch television till ten or half past ten and go to sleep we sleep instantly. I may wake up once in between, then have another stint and then it will be morning. So television helps.[3]

A comparatively younger housewife, Bini, also told of the comfort of watching television rather than having nothing to do but to go to bed early.

> I am not particular that I should see the programmes but see them because...are we not simply sitting here in the evening? So instead of going to sleep early we just keep it on...thinking why to sleep so early...that is all.[4]

Unlike the Pullolis or Bini, the Charuvils made the point that watching television is not just a time-filler, it is an enjoyment. In other words, they implied in the following exchange, that television viewing is worth staying awake a little later.

> *S*: So your sleeping time has been reduced with television!
>
> *Chacko*: Yeah.
>
> *S*: Do you think it as a loss?
>
> *Chacko*: Oh! There is no loss, because we have time pass.[5]

The delay in bedtime is not a problem if all the family members watch together and that is what happens in most of the families. However, in a few families some of its members watch television late into the night and this becomes a problem and disturbance to the sleep of other members. In other words, television viewing affects

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[2] Muruppel Family. *Interview*. 17-05-2001

[3] Pulloli Family. *Interview*. 20-06-2001

[4] Inchakkalayil Family. *Interview*. 29-05-2001

[5] Charuvil Family. *Interview*. 14-05-2001

the sleep of the non-viewers in some families. For instance, in the Edayilyath family, Deenamma has to endure her grandsons watching television.

> *Saramma*: [During vacation] these boys may sit up to midnight and sometimes even up to one o'clock.
>
> *Deenamma*: They would even go up to two in the morning.
>
> *Saramma*: She would scold them...She would shout and sometimes call me up to stop them.
>
> *Deenamma*: They wouldn't let me sleep. For me there should not be any sound or light while I sleep. Saramma will sleep even if she lies just near to the television.
>
> *Saramma*: Yeah, I have more than enough to do and I am dead tired by the evening. But when she calls me I will get up and shout at them to switch off.[6]

In addition to such disturbance to the sleep of others the late viewing causes problems in other ways as well. For instance, the Edayilyath children sometimes leave the television on and fall asleep. They do not have a timer, so when they doze off their mother has to get up and switch the television off.[7]

In short, for many families television viewing has contributed to a delay in their bedtime but has not made any changes in their waking up time. Most of them sleep an hour less with television around but it is not considered a problem, especially if all the family members are viewing together. Otherwise, it causes occasional disturbances to the non-viewers especially the very senior members in some families.

6.3 Eating

The families in this study follow different patterns when it comes to eating. As in the case of sleeping, television viewing and eating do not intersect in some families at all. For instance, the Niravaths and the Ottaplackals, who have separate television rooms, eat without watching television. In the Karivedakath family, on the other hand, the television set is placed in the dining room itself. "We watch mostly when the children come from school and eat their food," says Sheeba.[8]

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[6] Edayilyath Family. *Interview*. 28-05-2001

[7] In this way, at least in some families, switching television off has become an added parental responsibility in the night. This is not new for many parents because they had to do the same with the lights when their children fell asleep while studying. It has been a nightmare for many parents (like mine) when their children were studying with kerosene lamps.

[8] Karivedakath Family. *Interview*. 30-05-2001

The whole family or some of its members eat and watch television simultaneously in the rest of the families. In the case of the Anjilivelils, Arackals and Charuvils, all the family members watch television during meal time. "All the three meals we eat watching television," says Ponnamma with a laugh.[9] In these families, the television is placed in such a way that it can be watched both from the sitting and the dining area of the house.[10] In the case of the Oonnukallils, Kuzhivilas and Kottarathils, however, there is no such access from the dining room and it is only some of its members, especially children, who will bring food and eat before the television. Ginu narrates the difference with the arrival of television by saying: "Before TV, we used to sit and eat in the kitchen. Now in the night we children will bring food and sit before the television and eat."[11] Many children sit in front of the television and eat their evening snacks on their return from school.

'Television-oriented eating' is more pronounced with the children. While the septuagenarians of the Inchakkalayils, Kottarathils, Edayilyaths and Chekkulaths are not keen on watching television while eating, their children, especially their grandchildren, are proficient in doing both simultaneously. As long as both are matched, it is not considered a problem. The exception comes when they, especially the small children, keep on watching and become very slow in eating as in the Arackal family.

> *Babu*: At times we watch television while eating. Most of the days I switch it off because children will keep on watching and not eat. They will not finish eating even after the cable operators call it a day.[12]

Whether a family would watch television while eating depends also on the time at which meals are served in the family.[13] Since many of them do not have a fixed meal time, if food is served at the time of a preferred programme then there would not be many sitting in the dining room. For instance, all of the Kottarathils would gather in

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[9] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[10] See 3.3

[11] Kuzhivila Family. *Interview.* 15-05-2001

[12] Arackal Family. *Interview.* 11-05-2001

[13] This differs from audiences who organise their meal time *vis-à-vis* preferred programmes, for example, as noted in the United States. See Thomas R. Lindlof, Milton J. Shatzer and Daniel Wilkinson. 1988. "Accommodation of Video and Television in the American Family". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. pp. 176–177

front of the television with their food if dinner is served at the time of the tele-quiz show *kodipati*. As Anita recounts:

> When there is a power-cut and most other times we sit in the dining room and eat. Sometimes we sit before television and that is mainly in the night.
>
> *S*: Why is that?
>
> *Anita*: Why because if we have our dinner around half past eight it is the time of *kodipati*. Because of the interest to see that programme we come and sit before television.[14]

The practice of watching television while eating seems not to bother these families. This may be because meal times were not family times even before the arrival of television, as women could hardly sit with the male members of the family. Women were supposed to serve the male members first and eat only after others finished their meal. At present such segregation is generally on the decline and now there is the possibility for all the family to eat together. The practice of watching television by all or some members of the family during meal times, however, makes it again a less than family affair. Since they do not consider it a problem, it can be said that television is allowed to intrude into the dining time. It needs to be emphasised, however, as I show in the next section, that despite prime time television transforming their practice of dining, the menu is not greatly influenced by television.

6.4 Purchasing

Unlike practices such as sleeping and eating, television has comparatively less influence, Marthomites and other families claimed, on what they buy and consume. Except for one or two interview participants, i.e. Ottaplackal Nitty and Neduvellil Jolly who commend advertisements for informing them about available products in the market, almost all the others treat advertisements as a nuisance. The 'ad' time is mostly used for channel switching or taking a break or, as we shall see below, for talking among the family members. In other words, they do not claim to watch advertisements or buy anything, especially expensive items, simply because of the ads on television. In fact, one of the families suggested a considered opposition against television ads. "We have taken a decision that we would not buy anything for

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[14] Kottarathil Family. *Interview*. 02-06-2001

which there is too much advertisement. It is not possible all the time, but yet we try," said Gopalan Nair.[15]

What many of the families bought in response to television advertising was only some food items, toiletries and cosmetics. Maggie Noodles is one item most of the families tried after seeing it advertised on television. Babu explains:

> *S*: Have you bought anything by seeing ads?
>
> *Babu*: Not, except noodles. That too I bought because of the children. When they had seen the Noodles ad, they asked what it was. So once or twice we bought and made it for them. Even when they grow up and ask for things on the basis of ads I am not going to buy everything. I will buy on the basis of what I feel about life and what is affordable. I can buy noodles, and there is not much expense in making it. Otherwise I won't go for anything just because the children had seen and asked for it. I won't buy dress or anything like that.[16]

Apart from ads, cookery programmes are also cited inspiration for purchasing certain edibles. Jolly, for instance, bought a cake and she explains herself by saying, "Recently when they have shown something about making cake my daughter wanted to buy that."[17]

The Charuvils who run a shop testified that television ads prompt the purchase of certain items, especially, those which have free gifts. John explains:

> This I know as I am running a shop. People will come and ask for things that they had seen in the advertisement, especially free items. It will mostly be items like soap with offers like 'Buy four for three' and things like that. When I go to the wholesale shop they will say that there are new offers, especially with gift items and I will buy them. The ads may come only later and then people would come asking for that particular item.
>
> *Ponnamma*: Many people will come and ask just because of the ads. Sometimes there will be offers like '250gm sugar free with 250gm tea.' People will come and ask that.[18]

Even when items like edibles, soaps or facial creams are bought on the strength of a television ad, as the above comments indicate, continued purchasing depends on satisfaction with the products. "If the soap has good smell," comments Mini, "then

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[15] Suvarna Nivas Family. *Interview*. 24-06-2001

[16] Arackal. *Interview*.

[17] Neduvellil Family. *Interview*. 15-06-2001

[18] Charuvil. *Interview*.

we may buy them again."[19] The same logic is applied to other products as well. The Mullumkuzhys, for instance, bought Maggie Noodles, only once.

> *Mercy*: We bought Maggie, seeing the ad.
>
> *S*: Did you buy them again?
>
> (Everybody laughs)
>
> *Merin*: No.
>
> *S*: Why not?
>
> *Merin*: We didn't like it.[20]

Like the Mullumkuzhys, some other families also tried 'Maggie' just once and then stopped. As in the case of Noodles, some other families told of instances of frustration when buying a few things on the basis of the advertisements. This experience in turn, it is suggested, functions as a deterrent to trusting what is shown on television. Susamma, for instance, does not mind watching ads but would not buy non-stickers any more. "I had a bad experience buying it. So nowadays I tell everybody not to buy it" she says.[21]

One item that most of the girls in this study said they had bought after seeing its ad is a cream (Fair and Lovely). They bought it hoping that it would make them "fair and lovely" but were disappointed. Nitty implies in the following exchange that ads 'raise expectation and create frustration':

> *S*: Have you continued to use 'Fair and Lovely'?
>
> *Nitty*: I used it for sometime...Now it is lying somewhere there.
>
> *S*: Why have you stopped?
>
> *Nitty*: At first there was much excitement thinking how much change it would bring...Now after using for sometime I haven't seen any great difference. My skin looks just the same. So it lies somewhere there.[22]

From the above discussion, it is clear that what is bought because of television is rather limited, even though television seems to increase "experimenting consumers."[23] When it comes to purchasing it is the opinion of knowledgeable

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[19] Mullumkuzhy Family. *Interview*. 16-05-2001

[20] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[21] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[22] Ottaplackal Family. *Interview*. 22-06-2001

[23] Sevanti Ninan. 1995. *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. p. 143

friends and others that is valued more than television ads. For instance, Babu bought the latest model refrigerator and Deck but would not give credit to television for his purchase.

> *S*: How did you buy this Deck? Have you seen any ads of it?
>
> *Babu*: No. This and other electronic gadgets we have are of one brand. Philips Company is reliable. I bought it upon the basis of my previous experience with the same company and on the advice of friends who know about it.[24]

Even in buying their television sets many families in this study said they had been guided by the opinion of their friends rather than by any advertisements. In short, television is not acclaimed by many of the interview participants as an aid in their buying and spending. The maximum it does is reinforce certain brand names like 'Maggie' rather than 'noodles' and initiating a chain of experimentation in certain items. In other words it is friends and experience rather than television which have a more direct influence on the way the Marthomite and other families go about their purchasing and consuming.

6.5 Chatting

It has already been hinted that in some families members talk when ads are shown. Besides that, does television provide the families an occasion to sit together and talk with each other? This question generated a mixed response across the families and also within some of them. It is acknowledged, though implicitly, that television gathers family members together and therefore results in more physical proximity. Watching television has become another occasion for the family to come together. Whether the television-aided physical proximity leads to increased verbal communication is a question that generated different responses.

While many of the families told about talking during television viewing, one family, the Charuvils, especially commended television for providing an opportunity to sit together as a family. As they indicate in the following exchange, television has ushered in the possibility of physical proximity and casual talk.

> *Chacko*: Earlier times, my wife and I hardly had sat together.
>
> *S*: So television gives an occasion for you to sit together?
>
> *Chacko*: Yeah. For not just the two of us, we all three sit together.

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[24] Arackal. *Interview*.

S: Were you not sitting together that much before television.

Chacko: No.

Moncy: Except at meal times.

S: Has television increased or decreased your talking?

Ponnamma: It's not reduced. In fact, it has increased (laughs).

S: How is that?

Chacko: We will make some comments on what we see. We don't sit together much otherwise. So when we sit together we talk.

S: What do you talk about?

Chacko: Mainly about the film or news and things that we watch. For instance today we were discussing why our district has got no representation in the State Cabinet. Things like that we discuss.[25]

Even others who had not acknowledged the physical proximity that television provides echoed the Charuvils saying that television provides an occasion and topics for talking among the family viewers. Bini explains:

> We talk about what we see…discuss and make comments on the story, acting, the way the story progresses, its possible ending…things like that. So television has not affected our interaction or talking…We also evaluate the action of each character and sometimes would say, 'what foolishness she had done' and things like that. We also compare one serial with another. Say for example, the first *Sthree* serial was better than the second serial *Sthreejanmam.*[26]

As with the Charuvils and Inchakkalayils, some other families e.g. the Kuzhivilas and the Kottarathils also will talk but mainly during the ads. Some others, however, talk even otherwise. At least at times, the television programme becomes a background for them to chat with each other. Chekkulath Sali said that they will simply keep the television on but talk among themselves, especially when her sisters come from Kuwait for holidays.

Television sets the agenda for conversation outside the home also as peers, neighbours, and more significantly, people across the class divide talk about television programmes.[27] Ponnamma tells how it happens between neighbours:

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[25] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[26] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[27] For a discussion on the 'agenda setting' function of mass media, see Denis McQuail. 2000. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory,* 4th Edition. London: Sage. pp. 455–457

> There is a woman in our neighbourhood who will come to our shop to buy things and if they did not get the cable connection on the previous night, she would ask me about the serial and sometimes she will sit here and watch.[28]

Missing an episode of a serial may prompt television related talk but that is not always the case. Neighbours do talk about the story, make comments on how the story has developed and also criticise the plot. Sali, who prefers to talk to her neighbour rather than her husband about television, says:

> If we miss an episode of a serial then I will ask our neighbour about it. Sometimes in the evening we may talk to each other and speak about many things and then talk about television also. Sometime we would say that the story was farfetched and things like that.[29]

As has been mentioned above, television provides topics for conversation even among an unlikely group, that is, between domestic servants and their employers. Neduvellil Susamma, for instance, used to ask her servant the story of an episode if she missed it on an afternoon. Similarly Punnooreth Ammini, a domestic servant, said that she and her *kochamma*[30] would talk about the evening serials on the following day.

Apart from home and neighbourhood, television provides topics of conversation in the workplace, especially in schools. How this happens in the school is related by many of the school children among our interview participants.

> *S*: Do you discuss about television programmes at school?
>
> *Anita*: Yes. If some of the children had seen a new film they would come and enquire whether we had seen it or not. If we haven't, then either they will tell the story on their own or we will ask them about it.[31]
>
> *Soji*: When we are having our lunch at the school—we have a regular group for lunch—we talk about serials and films.[32]

In short, television viewing and television programmes facilitate conversation within and outside the domestic context for many families in this study. In this sense, television viewing is not a silent or silencing affair for them. Instead of silence, in

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[28] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[29] Chekkulath. *Interview*.

[30] *Kochamma* literally means little mother. One of its various usages, as here, is to address the employer (mistress) of the house by the servants.

[31] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[32] Anjilivelil Family. *Interview*. 10-05-2001

fact, the talking that occurs during the programmes can even provoke conflicts, as with the Kuzhivilas, where the children like to concentrate on the story line and dialogue but their mother and friends can't help making comments.

Some of the families, however, took a diametrically opposite view to the one mentioned above. Families like the Edayilyaths do not talk at all while watching whereas in the Anjilivelils, comments, if made at all, are between the mother and the daughter. "We usually do not discuss the content of the programme. We just watch," says Abraham in this regard.[33] These families do not believe that television can help family interaction and dismiss the chat during television viewing as inconsequential. "With television, the talking at home as a whole is reduced. Now, if you continue to have the television on you will be able to make a comment or two in between" argues Abraham.[34] He and some others complained that television silences the family by eroding the talking time at home. For instance:

> *Mini*: Television has decreased talking at home. How is it possible to talk when you watch television? That is why their father does not like watching television.
>
> *Mercy*: My father likes everybody sitting together and talking. On Sundays when he is around, we sit together and talk till the evening film.[35]

Thus the families hold divergent opinions regarding the influence of television on family conversation in the domestic context. In the case of some families, however, the family members disagreed among themselves on this issue. For instance, in the Arackal family the husband and wife could not agree with each other as revealed in the following exchange.

> *Beena*: Since we bought television, the practice of sitting together and talking, especially in the evening, have been reduced. It is a fact. Before we had this set, *achayan* [Babu] used to talk about his day in the factory.[36] The children were small but still we all used to sit together. But now, whenever there is some time, we start watching television.
>
> *Babu*: I don't agree with that. See, to talk it is not necessary that we should speak in the evening, there are always other times to speak.

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[33] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[34] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[35] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[36] Some women call their husband *achayan.*

Beena: (Laughs) Not that. It was special we talk in the evening.

Babu: In those days we had free time only during the evenings. Now a days…I don't say that it is because of television.

Beena: I feel there is a change.[37]

Unlike the practices of sleeping, eating and buying, the influence of television on talking appears to have generated divergent opinions among certain families. What is generally implied is that television has not replaced talking in the house despite its positive or negative impact on the act of talking. Many families consider that television enables them to sit together and talk with each other. Even those who complained that television has silenced them at home have not stopped watching television and this in itself is an indication that the perceived loss is not considered as a grave problem in the domestic context.

So far I have been analysing the influence of television on some of the family practices which are common to all the family members. The next few practices that I analyse pertain to different groups in the family, i.e. students, housewives and working adults.

6.6 Studying

There was a near unanimity across the families, especially among the parents and grandparents on the issue of the influence of television viewing on the studies of the children. The Life course project research in the United States has found that parents share a common "public script" that television harms their children's studies.[38] Almost all the families in the present study, in a similar way, consider television to have a negative impact on studies at home. However, the children were hesitant to endorse their parents' point of view.

Television is considered to be a potential danger for all students whether they are in pre-school or in twelfth grade (Pre Degree). If this apprehension had delayed the procurement of a television set in some families, the same is cited as the reason not to subscribe to cable television in some others. The apprehension grows day by day as their children grow and will subside only when they finish their education,

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[37] Arackal. *Interview*.

[38] Public script indicates a perception widely shared. For the development and discussion of this concept see, Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane F. Alters. 2004. *Media, Home, and Family*. New York: Routledge.

especially the twelfth grade exam, which will decide their entry into a professional college.

The only family in this study which is not panicking is the Mullumkuzhys. According to Mini, her children who are in the higher secondary classes "study on their own, despite television."[39] On the other hand the Inchakkalayils who have one child in pre-school and another in first standard are already afraid of television and their television viewing is dictated by the children's homework. "Once they finish their homework we would switch on television," says Bini.[40]

Television is considered to harm studies in many ways. In addition to the time spent in watching television, what is seen and heard is feared to have the potential to distract them afterwards. "Even when they study, they would be thinking of what they have watched on television," argue Oommen and Abraham.[41] Teachers also contribute to this blame-game of television. For instance, the apparent lack of memory for Binu, the younger boy of the Karivedakaths, is attributed to television by his teacher. According to Sheeba, his mother:

> Maybe because of the cable television and consequent film viewing, I don't know, Binu forgets what he learns. Of late there was slackness in his studies and I went to the school. So his teacher made this complaint and suggested that he perhaps should not watch too much television. I also felt that. We teach him everything at home but he forgets every thing at school.[42] It is then that the teacher raised this suspicion.[43]

If Sheeba is not very sure whether to accuse television viewing of being the sole cause for her son's problem in learning, the teacher in this case and the elders in other families have no such hesitation in pointing their finger at television. For them, it is indeed television that hampers the progress of their children's studies and results in their failures. The under-performance in exams according to the women of the Edayilyath family needs no other explanation.

> *Saramma*: Because of television, they wouldn't study. See, he [Ashok] should have got first class in his tenth standard, but in the end he just managed to get a pass.

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[39] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[40] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[41] Neduvellil. *Interview*, Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[42] Sheeba requested me to pray particularly about this problem, and I obliged.

[43] Karivedakath. *Interview.*

Deenamma: He should have got much more. He is intelligent.

Saramma: But what to do. If you sit before television all the time, what will you get?[44]

They are not alone in accusing television of being the villain. For instance, the following transcript, though rather lengthy, expresses similar concern in great detail.

Rosamma: Television is not good for one thing, that is, children's studies. It is bad for studies.

S: Why do you say that?

Rosamma: See, my second daughter...she had good marks in her Christmas term exam. Then she was confident, and was seeing television in the evenings saying she has got good marks in the previous exams. But in the final exam she did not get that much. And then last year in the eleventh standard, I warned her of what happened in the previous year. So she got a pass.

S: What do you think the real problem is?

Rosamma: I would say it is because of television. When she comes home, she will sit before it for half an hour saying she is tired and is relaxing. Then later in the evening, after taking a shower she will watch again saying she is feeling sleepy and will watch only for some time. Now it is thirty days since she has started her twelfth grade. I always caution her and others that if they go on watching television their future will be bleak. Because, if they watch television then they would not study well...My elder son failed in his first attempt to pass his twelfth...He was also watching television.[45]

In short, television has become a 'headache' for the parents when it comes to studies at home. "I have to shout to make them study," says Rosamma. "I always have to shout saying, if television was not here, there would have been much less headache," says Kunjamma.[46] The parents are already stressed in their pursuit of ensuring a good education for their children, which for the most part is evaluated on the basis of the marks alone, and television adds to their strain and fears. As a result, regulation of television viewing has become another parenting issue for these families.

Most of the parents believe that by controlling television viewing they can help their children in their studies. Hence, some of them have gone to the extreme of avoiding cable television altogether. The two families in this study who are resolute in keeping

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[44] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[45] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[46] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

cable away for the sake of their children's studies are the Niravaths and the Oonnukallils. Nirmala, uncharacteristically, was very categorical in this regard:

> We will go for cable only after the studies of our children. Once my younger son Bevin completes his twelfth grade then only we will think of cable. We are apprehensive about the impact of television on studies.
>
> *Samuel*: Now he does his homework keeping television on.[47] But we cannot tell him not to watch, as he is the top in his class. But if there were cable, it would severely affect his studies.
>
> *Nirmala*: Many of my colleagues in the school have taken cable and have requested us not to repeat that mistake. It caused severe problems for their children as they started watching television more. In fact, they have pleaded with us not to go for cable.
>
> *S*: Would it have been true with your children?
>
> *Nirmala*: When they were small we were in Nigeria and we had cable. Then they were in front of the television set almost all the time.[48]

The Niravaths have also taken a similar decision to delay access to cable, even though it was explained in a more diplomatic manner:

> *Philip*: We haven't taken cable connection. Not that we do not trust our children, but why to create a situation like that. If there is cable it may be a temptation for us [parents] also to watch. So we thought of avoiding it and I told the children that we don't want it at the moment. As long as they are studying we won't take cable. Once they grow up and become mature then we can have.[49]

These families want to avoid the "temptation" of cable television by forbidding it and sacrifice their own interest for the sake of their children.[50] They, however, can afford to compensate this denial of cable television by renting videocassettes over the weekend or taking the children to the cinema once in a while.

The rest of the families would forbid cable television only seasonally, i.e. during study leave and exam periods. They adopt various methods in this regard such as cancelling the cable connection, blocking the channels, or shifting the television set itself. Some of them adopt more than one method as in the Edayilyaths.

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[47] Barrios suggests a similar practice among children in Venezuela. Unlike them, however, Bevin doing homework in the proximity of an activated set is an exception in the present study. Leoncio Barrios. 1988. "Television, Telenovelas, and Family Life in Venezuela". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. Lull. p. 71

[48] Oonnukallil Family. *Interview*. 23-06-2001

[49] Niravath. *Interview*.

[50] 5.2.3

> *Saramma*: Till last January, television was kept here in the front room. Since these fellows were watching it more and more, when their father came in January he stopped the cable.
>
> *Deenamma*: It was for the sake of their studies.
>
> *Saramma*: Yeah, then television was shifted to the bedroom...Ever since it has been kept there...It is to check their viewing.[51]

The children of the Ottaplackals, Nitty and Nimmy are commended by their father as being "self disciplined not to watch television too much."[52] Even then he locked the channels during their study leave.

> *Nitty*: *Pappa* wouldn't allow us to watch during exam time. Then he would lock the channels.
>
> *Renjan*: I haven't done that many times.
>
> *Nitty*: Yeah, it is once or twice during exam time. So even if we wanted to see we wouldn't be able to watch.
>
> *Renjan*: Yeah, that was once during the study leave. We [he and his wife] are not here during daytime, you see. So Nitty herself had said about having a temptation to switch it on. So I just locked the channels during that time. That is all. Otherwise I haven't done that.[53]

In short, though apologetically as in the case of Renjan, almost all the parents want to guard their children from television. They, as it has been mentioned in the last chapter, curtail their own interest in television viewing and control the engagement of their children.[54] There is only one justification for employing such controls; that is, the studies of their children. "We have to be mindful of the children and to be careful. Once their studies are over then it would not be a problem," says Abraham.[55]

It is interesting to note that except in studying, television is not considered to be a problem. The parents are not worried about the influence of television on other practices, like the delay in sleeping or sitting in front of the television and eating. They are also not worried much by the content of what their children watch.[56] On the other hand, if television can help their children in their studies they are more than willing to permit its use. Abraham, who regulates television viewing for the sake of

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[51] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[52] Ottaplackal. *Interview*.

[53] Ottaplackal. *Interview*.

[54] For restricted viewing according to the school calendar see 5.2.3

[55] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

[56] See 5.3.3

his children's studies by various methods described earlier and also by placing the set on a slab high above the eye level of the children during exam time,[57] switches on television himself early in the morning to persuade his daughter to get up to study. "From five o'clock onwards we have to call them to wake up. So I will switch on the television and there will be some songs or things like that. Then, to watch that they will get up. After one or two songs I will switch it off," he reasons.[58]

The knowledge that television viewing would be encouraged if it is perceived as useful in studies has prompted at least one of the children to use it as a ploy to watch what she wanted. This happened in Oonnukallil where there is no cable television.

> *Nirmala*: Television is sometimes good for children's education also. For instance when Sherin was in the first year in College their Hindi teacher recommended seeing some Hindi serials to learn the language.
>
> *Sherin*: (Laughs) That I have bluffed to watch the serials.[59]

Parents and grand parents, irrespective of their class or religious differences, in short, exhibit a near phobia of television only when it is perceived to be a problem for their children's studies.[60] They and the teachers join together in blaming television as the villain if their children do not perform as they wished them to. But how do the children look at this issue?

Generally, the children do not share the fear of their parents and do not make television the scapegoat for any slackness in their studies. Even though it is difficult to contradict their parents to their face and especially in the presence of a stranger with parental authority (pastor)—in the person of the researcher—many of the children did give indications that they disagree with their parents' judgement and accusation of television viewing. In certain families it found expression in pauses, smiles and hesitant nods, while in some other families the disagreement was articulated in a subtle way. The one family where there was strong refutation was the Edyilyaths as witnessed in the following exchange.

> *S*: Are you suggesting that their study is affected by television?

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[57] 3.3.1Anjilivelil

[58] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[59] Oonnukallil. *Interview.*

[60] Poor grades in school are attributed to media by many Mormon parents in the United States. See Daniel A. Stout and David W. Scott. 2003. "Mormons and Media Literacy: Exploring the Dynamics of Religious Media Education". In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage. London: T& T Clark. p. 150

Saramma: Yes. It is not going well ever since we have TV.

S: What do you say?

Ashok: It has helped me to learn more things.

S: Like?

Ashok: About the world in which we live.

S: But your mother says that it has affected your studies badly?

Ashok: (Pause) That is what people generally say about television.

S: How is it in your case?

Deenamma: It has really affected their studies.

Ashok: I don't think so.

S: What about you Abhilash?

Abhilash: (Pause) Um.[61]

Many children, though not as forthright as Ashok, suggest that their parents are simply repeating "what people generally say" (the 'public script'), and disagreed with their elders for linking problems in their studies directly with television viewing.

Kunjamma: In my opinion, she is not putting all her effort into studies. Television is the reason.

Soji: I don't think so. English is a difficult subject for me.[62]

Again, in the Kottarathil family where Rosamma spoke at length about the ill effects of television on studies, the youngest of the children hinted that her mother was over reacting.

S: Anita, have you felt that television has hampered your studies?

Anita: I have not felt like that.

S: But your sister lost marks in her exam?

Anita: (Laughs) That's because she has not studied properly.

S: Not because of TV?

Anita: Sometime she watched television as well. But even otherwise she spent time without studying.[63]

Even where children did not want to contradict their parents they did communicate their disagreement in a subtle way. For instance, in the Niravath family the question

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[61] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[62] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[63] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

on this issue at two different times evoked different responses from the children despite their parents' effort to have them comply with their opinion.

S: So when will you take cable?

Philip: When Sunu finishes her twelfth…we may subscribe.

S: Are you happy about it?

Suma: They are happy.

(After sometime in the interview)

S: If you were given an option would you have gone for cable?

Children: (Pause)

Soni: Because of the studies, I would not opt.[64]

Surely there is a difference in the perception of parents and children about the negative impact of television viewing on studies. It must be emphasised that even among siblings there were differences of opinion with regard to this issue. In short, while parents have a near phobia of television when it comes to studies, children would not go all the way to support them.

6.7 Working

As it has been mentioned above, almost all the parents in this study alleged that television viewing has negatively influenced their children's work (study) at home, implying that children are victims of television viewing.[65] This disputed allegation raises the related question of whether television influences adult members working at home. Does television reconfigure their work, especially that of women, as is thought to have happened elsewhere?[66]

This question assumes all the more significance because, as it has been shown in the last chapter, the nature of family members' work has a decisive influence on their television viewing time.[67] The influence of television on work, however, is said to be

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[64] Niravath. *Interview*.

[65] This is not an attitude of the parents alone. Gauntlett has rightly suggested that media theorists and scholars of the "effect school" have inappropriately circulated such notions. David Gauntlett. Ten Things Wrong with the "Effects Model". http://theory.org.uk/david/effects.htm. Accessed on Thursday, March 27, 2003 at 10 hrs

[66] 5.2.2. See also Cecilia Tichi and Lynn Spigel. 1991. *The Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[67] 5.2.2

negligible. The families stated that only homework, that is, work-brought-home, has the potential to be affected by television. The housewives, for whom the domestic context itself is their worksite, were categorical in denying any influence of television viewing on their work and insisted that they watch television only when they had finished their work. Mini, who usually watches a film in the afternoon, echoes many others in saying "Watching television is not the most important thing. Only when the work is completed do we watch television. If I want to go and visit somebody or if there is more work at home then I would not see television."[68]

"Work is more important," said all the women, "than watching television." Unlike some of the women in a study of a North Indian village,[69] the women in this research, on the whole, claimed that they do not allow television viewing to disrupt their cooking activities. Until and unless there is something very important on television they wouldn't rush their work. Rosamma was not an exception in making the following response:

> *S*: Would you finish your work early to watch television?
>
> *Rosamma*: It depends. If there is election result telecast or Maramon Convention report then I may finish work early to watch them. Otherwise, just for a film I wouldn't rush. If there is time to watch we would watch it, if not we won't. There is no compulsion as such. However good a film is, I would take a nap in the afternoon.[70]

Even though Rosamma differs from Mini who would watch a film in the afternoon rather than taking a nap, they have no difference of opinion—that watching television has no influence on their work. Only Thenguvila Miriam, among the women, blamed television for slowing down her domestic work, despite her claim of watching much less television. Again, it is only she who reported the use of a nearby grinding shop rather than the mixer at home in order to "save time for television."[71] The rest of the women said that they would not bother to save time for television. This situation differs from women elsewhere, for instance those in England. Researchers like Morley and Hobson found that in England, women watch television

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[68] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[69] Neena Behl. 1988. "Equalizing Status: Television and Tradition in an Indian Village". In *World Families Watching Television*, ed. Lull. p. 156

[70] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

along with their domestic chores.[72] In this present study, only one or two women, and those two very rarely, would engage in watching television while performing any household chores.[73] Anjilivelil Kunjamma, a working woman, once or twice looked at the serial while cooking in the kitchen and likewise Edayilyath Saramma used to listen to religious television on Sunday mornings while preparing to go to church. Otherwise, whenever there is a clash between work and watching television, it is the latter which is compromised. In other words, work dictates the television viewing of women at home. Perhaps, this notion that they have not wasted any productive time may be one of the reasons that they do not have any "guilt" feelings over watching what they watch.[74]

As women keep the boundary between work and television viewing intact for most of the time and men work outside the domestic context, the influence of television on the work of the adults is indicated to be inconsequential. The only man whose work has been affected by television is Charuvil Chacko. Because of his shop, he used to do 'homework' and this is said to have been under pressure from television.

> *Chacko*: We give credit from the shop. So I used to update each one's credit on a daily basis in the night.
>
> *Ponnamma*: *Achayan* used to do that promptly. Now watching news and other things affect it and he calculates it only when people come to settle the account.[75]

Except in such cases of homework of children and men, the work of the family, irrespective of their religious persuasions, remains unaffected by television and there

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[71] Thenguvila Family. *Interview*. 21-06-2001

[72] David Morley. 1986. *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Comedia Publishing Group, Dorothy Hobson. 1980. "Housewives and the Mass Media". In *Culture, Media, Language: Working papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson. pp.109–110. Barrios found the same among the Venezuela women as well. Barrios. "Television, Telenovelas, and Family Life in Venezuela". p. 71

[73] There is only one woman among my interview participants who uses any mass media in her kitchen—a tape recorder to listen to Christian songs.

[74] Morley suggested that television viewing for women is a 'guilty pleasure' because of the viewing in a patriarchal power context and resultant devaluation of women's genres. Morley. *Family Television*. pp. 159–162. Unlike Morley, Gauntlett and Hill have found that guilty feeling associated with television viewing is not confined to women alone. David Gauntlett and Annette Hill. 1999. *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge and British Film Institute. pp. 119–128. In the present study, feeling guilt was not a dominant response either among men or women.

[75] Charuvil. *Interview*.

is no reconfiguring in the work pattern of the family members, it is claimed. Some of the families like the Pullolis went to the extent of saying that television has helped them to mark the boundary between work and leisure itself. "Now we sit and relax. Otherwise, we would be wandering around the house and the land," they recall.[76]

In short, television is not considered to have encroached into their work; it only fills in their leisure time or defines leisure time for them. The complaints about the negative influence of television on studies, which was a "common public script" among the parents, seem to be the result of a lack of a boundary or its maintenance between the study time and leisure time in the domestic context in the case of the children.

If families watch television only during their leisure time, what has happened to their traditional leisure time activities like visiting and playing? This is what I examine below.

6.8 Visiting

Visiting relatives and friends has been a time-honoured practice in Kerala. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, television itself in its early days generated such visits even though they were slanted more to those who had a television set.[77] In this way both the Kuzhivilas and Pullolis continue to have visitors to watch television. In some neighbourhoods in Kerala, television has also generated visits across caste barriers and given access to an otherwise prohibited living room.[78] To watch television, the so-called "low caste" people in some areas would go to a nearby so-called "upper caste" house to view television.[79] But once a family buys a television set what happens to their social visits? Yadava and Reddi found that in urban India

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[76] Pulloli. *Interview.*

[77] 4.3.1.1

[78] This does not mean that watching television has abolished caste differences. In some parts of India, communal television viewing itself has been on caste lines, as suggested in 1.4.1. The point here is, television viewing has given a new opportunity for interaction across caste and class barriers and also provided access to hitherto denied space.

[79] Mostly they will not sit on a par with the house owners but on the floor or at the doorstep, which on the one hand reinforces the distinction but increases, on the other hand, the possibility of physical proximity and communication.

television has resulted in the substantial reduction in the frequency of visits to neighbours and relatives.[80] Has television become an obstacle for such visits in other parts of India as well?

There is near unanimity across the families in the present study that "with television at home," there has not been any decrease in their social visits. There was only one family which felt otherwise. Even those who believed that there was a general decline in visiting, however, had not put all the blame on television.

As in the case of working, the family members, especially the women members, were categorical in suggesting that they go and visit others when there is a need. "We are not sitting before this [television]. So we go and visit where we want to go," affirms Saramma.[81] "Even before television and even now, if there is somebody sick in the neighbourhood and if we want to see...we four sisters are in this neighbourhood...we get together and visit them in the evening. Television has not changed it," tells Rosamma.[82] Mullumkuzhy Mini asserted that television wouldn't come in her way of work or visiting others.

But what happens to the other visits, which were not related to any "need"? Unlike Saramma, Rosamma and others, Chechamma strongly believes that there has been a remarkable decline in the frequency of social visits. "Those times have gone," she laments recalling the earlier times of more interaction in the neighbourhood. At the same time, she is not ready to put the blame squarely on television. The decline in house visiting, "is not just because of television but due to many other reasons," she suggests.[83] Curiously, on the other hand, she has commended television for reducing such visits. Perhaps, reflecting on the adverse effects of too much visiting in the past she says, "In a way it is also good. If you speak too much with your neighbours, you might indulge in more gossip (laughs). Now that may be reduced...you watch this and then do your work."[84]

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[80] J. S. Yadava and Usha V. Reddi. 1988. "In the Midst of Diversity: Television in Urban Indian Homes". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. Lull. p.130. This finding was based on two studies spanning six cities and neighbouring areas and involved 1400 participants.

[81] Edayilyath. *Interview.*

[82] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[83] Chekkulath. *Interview.*

[84] Chekkulath. *Interview.*

While most families claimed that there was no change in their visiting, there was one exception. The Anjilivelils do blame television for the decline in their house visits. They emphasised that visiting others had been on the decline ever since they bought a television set. "I wouldn't go to *Kudumbath* [ancestral home] as I used to do before," says Abraham. In his opinion, television can at least delay their visits if not abolish them altogether. "Sometimes, on Sundays I would think of visiting somebody. But once you start watching some programmes you would sit till its end."[85] His mother, Aleyamma, complained that even when people visit others, consumption of media takes precedence over interpersonal communication. She cited one of her recent experience to prove her point:

> Yesterday we all went to visit my daughter. There we had seen a film on television [video] and came back. Apart from that we did not speak much. The return bus was at 5.45p.m. and the cassette was still not finished. Then we were saying, if this *kuntham*[86] were not there, people could have talked to each other. I would have praised God if it were not there.[87]

Even though the above comments give the impression that this family considers television a villain as far as their visits or the interactions during the visits are concerned, they seem not to consider that to be a grave problem. This is made clear by two factors. Firstly, Kunjamma suggested that there is no decline in the visitors to their house. She says, "I don't think there was any reduction in our visitors though there is a reduction in our visiting other homes."[88] As cited in Chapter Four, one of the major reasons for the Anjilivelils to purchase a television set was precisely to reduce the visits, especially of their children, to other houses.[89]

Secondly, although Aleyamma complained about watching a film during her visit, as the following exchange reveals, it was she who gave permission to watch it in the first place and actually watched it herself.

> *S*: But you could have avoided seeing the cassette!
>
> *Aleyamma*: Her children (laughs) said it was a good cassette. Then these children requested my permission. Once it had begun I also got interested in the story.

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[85] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[86] A colloquial word for sphere, used to indicate an unwanted bad object.

[87] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[88] Anjilivelil. *Interview*

[89] 4.3.2

S: But why didn't you say 'no' to cassette and propose talking to each other?

Aleyamma: That is, when they hired the cassette and brought it, how can I say no? (laughs)

S: If you had known that it would hamper the talking, why did you see it?

Aleyamma: It is how the mind works. Then there was curiosity to know the story.

The above comments suggest that Aleyamma enjoyed what she saw though her 'ideal' of visiting others would include more of interpersonal interaction. In other words, her reference to television as a *kuntham* seems to reflect more of her wishful thinking than actual practice.

The Anjilivelils, however, have a point in suggesting that there is a time-shift, at least at times, in terms of visiting. It has become a 'common public script' in Kerala that people hesitate to visit other houses during certain times like Sunday evenings when there is a film. Other than this, visits continue to take place, it is claimed. The decline in house visits may refer to those undertaken to pass time in the pre-television days. As the television set is used to pass time there may not be a need to visit others and talk simply for the sake of passing time. In this sense, unlike those in urban India, most of the families in this study do not consider that their social visits have been eroded by television. Lilly captures most of the families' perception on this theme when she says, "If I have to go somewhere or visit some people I won't sit back saying that there is a film or serial to watch. I would go."[90] With regard to the talk during such visits, I have already mentioned how television content is used for making common ground in talking with neighbours and friends. So if television has not reduced social visitations, talking during such visits has increasingly become television-centred, whether it is considered to be a problem or not.

6.9 Playing

Another leisure-time activity which could possibly bear the mark of television is playing, especially since it is mainly a children's activity and they are influenced by television in many of their daily practices. A negative influence of television on their

[90] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

play may justify another "common public script" that they are candidates, if not their parents, to be named "couch potatoes"[91] or its Indian version "couch *pakodas*"?[92]

Perhaps because of the rural context of the families in this study, almost all the children who participated in the interview reported that their play has not been affected by their television viewing. Anita echoes many children in declaring, "We play in the evening. My brother would also go out to play football. Our play has not increased or decreased with television around. The children from the neighbourhood would come here and we play together."[93]

Anjilivelil Biju, who takes turns with his sister Soji and even bribes her at times to keep his preferred television programmes on, as we have seen in Chapter Five,[94] would sacrifice his turn on certain days for the sake of playing. He says:

> Even if my favourite programme is on television, when my friends come and call me I will go. They would not call me everyday as I come late from school. We play as a team with the one on the other side of the village and if it is a final or we do not have enough numbers they would call me. Then I would surely go.[95]

Friends and playing seem more important than watching television for Biju and many other children in this study. If Biju prioritises playing over watching television, the Kuzhivila girls play is determined by what is on television. "We play in the evenings. Sometimes, if there is an interesting children's programme at that time we all would come and watch together. Otherwise we play outside," they claim.[96] In short, children still find time, friends and motivation to play. Perhaps television has reduced the playtime on the weekends for some children like Edayilyath Ashok but on the whole they are still playing and have not abandoned their play for the sake of watching television. They are not "couch *pakodas*."

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[91] Contrary to its origin, this term in common parlance has come to signify those who watch too much television. See Ien Ang. 1991. Desperately Seeking the Audience. London: Routledge. p. 1

[92] Philip Lutgendorf. 1995. "All in the (Raghu) Family: A Video Epic in Cultural Context". In *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 242. Another Hindi vernacular expression for couch potato is *Alloo Dum Dum*. See, Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher. 1999. "Introduction: Image Journeys". In *Image Journeys: Audio-visual Media and Cultural Change in India*, ed. Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher. New Delhi: Sage. p. 15

[93] Kottarathil. *Interview.*

[94] 5.4

[95] Anjilivelil. *Interview.*

[96] Kuzhivila. *Interview.*

The influence of television perhaps can be found, if not in the amount of play time, in what they play. Except for one or two boys and the girls, the boys in this study said that they play cricket. Although girls watch cricket on television, they do not play it. As a result they continue to play some of the traditional games like hide and seek and *cherukku kali*. Boys, on the other hand, either with formal kits or make-shift ones (like a bat made of coconut stem and handmade balls), play cricket. This was unheard of in Kerala before the spread of television. In this way one could perhaps point to television and other mass media for popularising cricket over other sports like football, volleyball and local games. Certain popular games at the village level, as a result, have slowly become extinct in the wake of cricket becoming so popular. There may be various reasons for this shift in the popularisation of one sport over others and the use of various media for the popularisation of cricket. The telecast of cricket matches is surely one factor which changed what the boys in this study play. Television coverage of cricket has made some of the adults who never wielded a bat or threw a ball avid cricket fans. Among others a septuagenarian Arackal Thomas and an otherwise not-so-keen television viewer Niravath Suma conceded that they would not miss a cricket telecast. The more proficient children or grandchildren have taught them the basic rules so that they can follow the game.

In short, from what the children have said and their parents confirmed, television and playing do not come in each other's way for most part of the time. The evening schedule of children testifies to this . Most of them are said to watch television on their return from school and then only late in the evening. This pattern provides them with enough time in between for other practices including their play.

6.10 Conclusion

My attempt in this chapter has been to analyse the influence of television viewing on various everyday practices of the families who participated in this study. The discussion so far reveals that most of the families claim to have adapted and accommodated television into their everyday lives without prejudicing many of their daily practices. Generally, television is not considered to be a negative influence on their practices and otherwise it is not considered a grave problem except perhaps in the case of children's studies. In other words, the families in this study reveal comfort and confidence, despite minor doubts, over the influence of television on their everyday lives. They seem to have domesticated television in the home sphere.

In this chapter I have shown that television viewing influences domestic practices with varying degrees. This influence is neither uniform on all the domestic practices within a particular family nor across all families who participated in this study. Some families do not feel any difference at all with regard to some of their practices while they feel some influence in others. No family is completely insulated and no family is completely swayed in all its practices by television. There is, still, a recognisable pattern in the way television interacts with various domestic practices across the families.

With television at home, many of the Marthoma families and their Hindu and Muslim counterparts sleep less than they used to do in their pre-television days. While many of them do not consider it a loss of time since they are passing time with television, television viewing has become a cause of annoyance at night for some of the non-viewers especially the elder members.

Television viewing has become much more involved, I have suggested, during the meal time in some families where prime time television has almost become television time for the family members. It is noted that the interest in watching television while eating is more pronounced among the children as compared with their grandparents. The concept of a family meal, which was not prevalent in Kerala, is fractured again by television, I argued, since the boundary between meal time and television time has increasingly becoming blurred.

If the influence of television on eating is perceived to be more in comparison with sleeping, it is suggested by almost all families that it is least with regard to their purchasing practices. I have shown that there was near unanimity within the families that television ads are not reliable in spending and investment. The maximum, the families have bought through watching advertisements was less expensive food items or cosmetics. Instead of depending on ads or experimenting with the products, they claim to consult friends and/or rely on their previous experience before major purchases.

The other two practices, which apparently bear the least influence of television in almost all families are social visitation and the playtime of the children. Visiting others is still considered to be a priority especially when someone is sick or in need. The families claim to give priority to social visits, despite the decline in visits to pass time. Similarly, the playtime of children is also suggested to be continuing as in their pre-television days though there is a change in what the boys play, that is cricket

other than traditional sports, and in the number of adult members watching cricket on television.

While there is near unanimity among the families in this study that they keep television away from their spending, visiting and playing they showed divergent opinions, even among the family members themselves in some cases, about the role of television in their chatting in the domestic context. Some families credited television with providing more physical proximity between family members, opportunity and topics for conversation among themselves, with neighbours, colleagues and more importantly, across the class divide. Some other families, or members of the families, asserted that television has been reducing their talk at home and questioned the worth of television-inspired talk itself. The latter, however, has not suggested the stopping of their television viewing to safeguard their chatting, which is something that they do for the sake of children's studies.

The divisions at home become more pronounced, especially across the generational divide, on discussing television with regard to the work of the family members in the domestic context. While emphatically refuting any negative influence of television on their work at home, the adults in nearly all families accused it of playing havoc with the studies of their children. Television viewing, in this respect, has become a new parental issue for the adults, though they did not consider it as pertaining to other practices like eating or sleeping. Being convinced that television is a threat only to the children's studies, the parents and elders try to regulate the amount of television their children watch. The children, however, indicated in many ways that they do not endorse their elders fully in their near phobia of television.

This chapter, in short, suggests that the families in this study are perceived to have incorporated television into their everyday life with minimum alteration to many of their everyday practices. They seem to have a firm control on television and adapt it without rejecting or replacing their traditional routines. While there are divergent perceptions across families and within some of them on the influence of television on certain practices, there were no instances of a division along the religious divide of the families in this study. Do the Marthoma families use television in the same way as that of their Hindu and Muslim neighbours when it comes to religious programmes and religious practices? In other words what is the interaction between television and religion? This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven
Television and Religion in the Marthoma Homes

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this research, as has been mentioned before, is on the interaction between television, religion and everyday practices of the Marthomites in Kerala. I have shown in the previous chapters that for Marthomites, as for Hindu and Muslim families, television viewing has become a daily habit with minimum disturbance to their everyday practices and cultural identity. Within this context, I investigate in this chapter the interaction between television viewing and religion in the domestic context. This is achieved by answering two questions: whether and how religion relates to television, and how television viewing influences the domestic religious practices of Marthoma families.[1]

The influence of religion on television viewing has been addressed partially in some of the previous chapters. I have shown that Marthomites said that they have had no religious sanctions against television and that their television viewing is shaped by their public religious practices.[2] In this sense I have examined what religion and public religious practices do to television viewing. In this chapter, I shift the focus to the interaction between television and religion in the domestic context. For the Marthomites, the family is an important cradle of faith, where faith and religious practices are cultivated and sustained. Since it is to this context that television has gained entry it becomes important to understand how television and religion interact in the domestic context. In this chapter I argue that most of the Marthoma families accommodate television viewing into their religious framework and domestic religious practices, with some ease.

I shall proceed in three sections. In the first section, I look at the relationship between religious affiliation and its influence on television viewing. It involves two inter-related questions of mutual influence. The first is to ask whether the faith of the families plays any role in their television viewing and the second question is whether

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[1] I do not distinguish between faith, belief and religion and use them synonymously and interchangeably in this study.

[2] See 4.3.2 and 5.2.4

watching television has any influence on their faith. The answers to these questions will show that watching secular television and religious beliefs are perceived to have little influence on each other by families of all religious persuasions.

In the second section I focus on the viewers' perceptions of watching explicitly religious programmes and their religious significance. By examining the responses to three issues, namely, the telecast of religious programmes on television, watching programmes of other religions and watching programmes of one's own religion, I show that Marthomites, like other families in this study, position themselves more explicitly within their religious identity in watching religious programmes. In a multi-religious society religious programmes amplify, I suggest in this section, religious identity.

While the first two sections deal with questions of television viewing and religious faith, the last section deals with the influence of television viewing on domestic religious practices. I point out varying degrees of shift in the family prayer across families of different religions in this section to suggest that except in the case of a few, most of the Marthoma families incorporate television into their everyday life without replacing or modifying their domestic religious practices.

7.2 Watching television and religious faith

How far does religion play a role in watching television? Does the programme selection vary with families of different religious persuasions? I have already pointed out in Chapter Five various reasons cited for the emergence of home channel, and for preferences and avoidance of programmes.[3] What was mostly absent in that discussion was any reference to religion. If audiences bring their repertoire of meaning-making resources to their practice of watching television one would expect religious discourses to be part of that repertoire. Put more simply, given that people bring their own narratives, beliefs and habits to television it would be surprising if religious discourses do not play any role in their television viewing. This expectation has prompted the above questions.

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[3] See 5.3

Though the levels of emphasis varied, generally all families in this study took the position that faith does not influence their selection of programmes and channels.[4] Mullumkuzhy Mini has not even thought of a link between the two. "We watch television to spend some time. Beyond that we have not thought about it," she concedes.[5] Kuzhivila Lilly and some other interview participants, however, seem to have thought about it, because they denied emphatically any connections. "Faith does not come into the selection and watching of television programmes. Faith comes into effect only in other matters," Lilly declares.[6] Charuvil Chacko was also certain that, unlike their suspicious attitude to cinema, and unlike people of other denominations, Marthomites do not make television a faith issue. In his opinion:

> We do not bring faith to watching television (pause). We do not have any such stipulations. Pentecostals have. We have not gone to that extent. They would not buy television. They consider it as wrong. My father is a Pentecostal.[7]

Chacko's wife and son, however, commented that even Pentecostals, including his own father, have started watching television. "Nowadays when he comes here," says Ponnamma, "he wouldn't mind seeing some programmes."[8] Moncy supports by saying that even "those die-hard Pentecostals have changed now. They had such inhibitions till about five, six years ago."[9] It seems that he considers it reassuring that even Pentecostals have stopped treating television as a faith problem.

The Marthoma families think, as Moncy indicated, that they are not an exception in keeping faith and television in distinct compartments of life. Except for Inchakkalyil Bini who did not want to predict how her neighbours of other religions would watch television, all other Marthomites appeared to be certain that the separation between religion and television viewing is something common to families of all religions. "Like anybody else we also watch programmes that we like to watch and religion has nothing to do with it," claims Mercy.[10] Religious identity is perceived to matter only

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[4] The exception is religious programmes which I discuss in the next section.

[5] Mullumkuzhy Family. *Interview.* 16-05-2001

[6] Kuzhivila Family. *Interview.* 15-05-2001

[7] Charuvil Family. *Interview.* 14-05-2001

[8] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[9] Charuvil. *Interview.*

[10] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

in faith and worship. "People of other religions do not go to Church...They go to temple and worship idols...We worship the living God...The difference is not in watching television," she continues.[11] In other words, she does not perceive anything distinctive about Marthomites in terms of watching television.

This perceived uniformity across families in watching television, however, changes as we shall see in the next section, when explicitly religious programmes are being watched. "We may like Bible related programmes more if and when it is shown. I do not know whether people of other religions would have that much preference for them," says Bini to suggest that religious programmes and secular programmes are watched differently.[12] It would seem that in the judgement of Marthoma television users in this study faith comes into play only when they watch faith-related television programmes.

Marthomites do not bring their religious convictions to watching secular programmes, but would such programmes have any impact on their faith? This has been explored by asking two questions, namely, whether they think of God while watching television and whether television has influenced their faith. All the families in this study suggested that they do not think of God when watching secular programmes. It became evident from the common refrain that if only there were more religious programmes they would think of God. Saramma was not alone to comment that, "Not many programmes are shown about God...There was one some time ago...Otherwise...we do not think of God while watching."[13] Chechamma has in fact made this her major complaint against television: "TV does not provide much to think of God. Where is it showing anything Christian to think of God?"[14] Chacko too affirms that he has "not thought of God or Christ on viewing programmes other than Christian."[15]

Marthomites are not alone in regarding secular television as hardly providing an occasion to think of God. "What is shown on television is mostly insufficient to

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[11] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[12] Inchakkalayil Family. *Interview.* 29-05-2001

[13] Edayilyath Family. *Interview.* 28-05-2001

[14] Chekkulath Family. *Interview.* 25-05-2001

[15] Charuvil. *Interview.*

invoke faith or God-feeling," argues Vijayamma.[16] "What to think of *Iswara* [God] in watching the serials and other programmes. What does it tell about *Iswara*? It shows only lovers rounding trees or running up and down singing or dancing," she mocks.[17]

As a result, watching secular television is perceived to have little relevance for one's faith.[18] "Why should there be any change in faith just because somebody watches television?" is the puzzled reaction from Chacko when asked about the possible influence of watching television on one's faith-life.[19] Others, however, were more categorical in affirming the boundary between television and faith. Mullumkuzhy Mini is one of them.

> I do not think that there is any relationship between television viewing and faith. Television does not affect our faith. Whether there is television or not we are to manage and lead our lives...what else. If there is television and if you like watching some programmes let that be. Those who do not like watching television they wouldn't...that is all...Just because somebody watches television it need not impact upon one's faith. It is one's own faith...that is what matters.[20]

Edayilyath Deenamma agrees with Mini. "There has not been any change in faith...There is no lack in it," she affirms.[21] Arackal Babu is another one who argued that faith and television viewing are separate. He elaborates:

> Faith is in our heart. That faith is not reduced because of television. I do not think that there is any link between television viewing and faith. We love God in our heart even before we started viewing television and we still love God. I always have the belief that God is always taking care of us. I teach my children the same.[22]

There are at least two reasons why Marthomites made the above comments to suggest the apparent separation between secular television and their faith. Firstly, they seem to think that only explicitly religious programmes on television have the ability to influence their faith. "Our faith has not increased. Are we not getting only

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[16] Suvarna Nivas Family. *Interview*. 24-06-2001

[17] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview*.

[18] I discuss the influence of television viewing on religious practice in the next section.

[19] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[20] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[21] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[22] Arackal Family. *Interview*. 11-05-2001

other programmes on television? There are hardly any spiritual programmes," says Rosamma echoing many others in this study.[23] Secondly, they do not consider television a source for faith. "Watching television is just for entertainment, isn't it?" asks Abraham indicating the difference in purpose with which television is approached. "So, when you are at home you are just watching some programmes, nothing more than that," he reasons.[24] Babu is in agreement with Abraham, and he explains it further:

> When we see serials or *chithrageetham*[25] or films, they are only images, pictures shot on films. They are not real. These are only pictures. We do not compare with that our faith or values. Our faith will remain intact irrespective of what we see. Our faith won't change. We see the programmes. It is to enjoy a cultural programme. A pastime. It is like seeing any other cultural programmes where people exhibit their talents. We are not told that believers should not see cultural programmes. So we watch and enjoy such programmes.[26]

Both Muslim and Hindu families also shared a similar perception with regard to secular television. Thankappan echoes what Usman says in this regard.

> Faith and television viewing? It has no interaction. No problem in our faith because of watching television. There is no increase in it either. We have faith and we worship. We are continuing with them. We did worship earlier and we do it even now. Our faith is neither going up nor coming down.[27]

In general, as the above comments indicate, the families in this study treat faith and television as distinct from each other. Television is for passing time and entertainment, but not for faith. Whether the availability of more religious programmes on television would have changed this perception is a point of contention. At the moment it is certain that Marthoma families do not consider television a resource for spiritual growth.

Instead, they continue to look to church as their main source for faith. "We have faith as we had it all the time because of going to church, prayer and such programmes. We also read Bible…So we have faith," suggests Rosamma.[28] Anjilivelil Abraham

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[23] Kottarathil Family. *Interview*. 02-06-2001

[24] Anjilivelil Family. *Interview*. 10-05-2001

[25] Film songs.

[26] Arackal. *Interview*.

[27] Pulloli Family. *Interview*. 20-06-2001. Thenguvila Family. *Interview*. 21-06-2001

[28] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

identified sermons as a resource. "I used to hear sermons from my childhood. So I know of faith and related matters."[29] It is these resources that are supposed to be reservoirs for faith-life, not television. The maximum television viewing can do, it is suggested, is to distract the not-so vigilant users from their aforementioned resources of faith. "If we are disciplined and follow a strict schedule for watching, then television cannot erode our faith," affirms Abraham.[30]

It is fairly clear from the discussion in this section that in the perception of the television users studied, faith and television do not intersect for most of the time. These families believe that watching secular television is not conditioned by the religious affiliation of the audiences. Conversely, watching secular television is not credited as having much influence on the faith of the families either. The Marthomites, like the Hindu and Muslim families, hardly think of God while watching secular television and such programmes are considered to have no religious significance at all. Faith in God and the practice of watching secular television, in short, appear to belong to distinctly different areas of life.

The reasons cited for separating secular television and religion suggest that religion has either become so ingrained in the everyday life that it is taken for granted needing no explanation or that watching television is considered a secular practice needing no religious purpose. This invokes the Malayalam proverb: *Palli vere pallikkoodam vere*, meaning, "church (religion) and church-run schools (secular) are different." Religious affiliation, however, may come into play, it was implied, in watching symbolic representations of religious stories, places and practices. It is to this issue that I turn in the next section.

7.3 Watching religious programmes

Many quotes in the above discussion hinted at a tendency among the families in this study to distinguish religious programmes from other programmes on television and to approach them differently. This raises three issues that are addressed in this section: broadcasting of religion on television, watching programmes of other religions and watching programmes of one's own religion. In this section, I demonstrate that Marthomites evaluate television from the standpoint of a minority

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[29] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

[30] Arackal. *Interview*.

religious group. They show divergent approaches to watching Hindu/Muslim programmes and Christian programmes on television. In other words, I argue that Marthomites bring their religious identity more explicitly to watching religious programmes. I also show a similar posturing among Hindu and Muslim families in their approach to programmes of their own religions and those of others.

7.3.1 *Doordarshan* and Hindu religious bias

On the issue of broadcasting religion, almost all Marthoma and Muslim families fault television in general and *Doordarshan* in particular for its Hindu bias. "DD promotes Hinduism in many ways," suggests Samuel. One of the ways it is done is by "telecasting serials based on Hindu stories, one after another."[31] Kuzhivila Lilly is angry at the sheer number of such serials. "They dub all those Hindi [Hindu] serials into Malayalam and every day you have one story or another. It is *Jai Hanuman* on one day, *Om Namashivay* on another. Then there is *Sri Krishna*, *Sri Ayyappan* and what not," she complains.[32]

Many families cited the abundance of Hindu religious programmes compared with an almost negligible telecast of Christian or Muslim programmes to highlight the discrimination by television companies. Promotion of Hinduism and neglect of Christian and Muslim religions are considered to be two sides of the same coin: "Television people show neglect towards Christians. Otherwise they would give Christian programmes as well," argues Lilly like many others in this study.[33] There are "Hindu serials all the time. But see what happened to the Jesus' story, *Dayasagar*. They stopped it after a few weeks," points out Molly.[34] Mullumkuzhy Mercy also "felt it." She used to "wonder why they are showing only serials like *Jai Hanuman* and not anything on Jesus Christ."[35]

Muslim families too are concerned and feel the same bias of *Doordarshan*. "Where do they show our [Muslim] programmes? Almost all the time they show only Hindu programmes. I do feel about it at times," says Miriam.[36] "Muslim programmes are

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[31] Oonnukallil Family. *Interview*. 23-06-2001

[32] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

[33] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

[34] Muruppel Family. *Interview*. 17-05-2001

[35] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[36] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

shown only occasionally. During special days or festivals they may show something, that is all" she adds.[37] Valiyaveettil Noorudin had similar feelings about the lack of attention Muslims receive on television. "On Friday morning there are songs for a short time. That is all. Otherwise not much is shown," he observes.[38]

Some of the Marthomites have gone further to argue that the bias of *Doordarshan* is not confined to the telecast of religious serials but also reflected in the telecast of other programmes, even news coverage. Chechamma argues in this vein:

> Almost all serials and even films have a Hindu bias.
>
> *S*: How did you know?
>
> *Chechamma*: That is how *Doordarshan* does generally. We can detect the moment we see. I used to tell her...see how they show as if India is a Hindu nation. Even in the news, I would say, that there is nothing supportive for Christians and Muslims.
>
> *S*: How is that in the news?
>
> *Chechamma*: See when it comes to programmes about Hindus...say temples and festivals, do you know in what great details they will say and show about them? At the same time if it is about any Christian or Muslim church or programmes they may just show a glimpse of it, that is all.[39]

Is this a problem of *Doordarshan* alone? While many families, like the Chekkulaths, put the blame squarely on *Doordarshan* for slanting towards Hinduism, there are a few like the Mullumkuzhys who do not make any such distinction. For them, television, irrespective of *Doordarshan* or cable television, is pro-Hindu. Mullumkuzhy Mini and Mercy made the same observation about cable television that Chechamma made above with regard to *Doordarshan*.

> It is the same with all channels...They would start the build up even a week before a Hindu festival. For instance, during the time of the *Vishu* festival, there will be songs related to the festival, films and Tele-films and other programmes for a week in almost all channels. The same is the case with other festivals and programmes. When it comes to Christian festivals like Christmas and Easter what will they show? Something will be shown just on that day, just for namesake, nothing else. We felt that is discrimination.[40]

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[37] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

[38] Valiyaveettil Family. *Interview*. 28-06-2001

[39] Chekkulath. *Interview*.

[40] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

Like the Mullumkuzhys, the Neduvellils also were in no mood to absolve cable television from any bias. "Discrimination of television against Christians can be seen again if the stories of serials and films are analysed...most of these are set against Hindu background," they point out.[41] Stories against the Christian background are very few and even those stereotype Christians. Susamma continues:

> Even if they show a story of Christians, for instance, in the *Dhanyam* serial one Christian family is portrayed...it is only the arrogance of affluence that is shown...Probably now they may show its downfall in the coming episodes.[42]

In other words, Susamma and her family indicate a tendency in television stories to caricature Christians as "arrogant and highhanded (rowdies)" and consider it another facet of discrimination against them on television.[43]

So complaints abound. Neduvellil Jolly says that even when Christians are shown they are mostly Catholics. In her opinion television is biased against Christians and more biased towards the non-Catholics like the Marthomites. It shows, "mostly about Catholics. *Dhanyam* is also about them. Even otherwise when Christian practices are shown, it is mostly presented as people praying before an image or crucifix and lighting candles or lamps."[44] Jolly was supported by her niece, Shaila: "Yes...other denominations or practices are not shown...especially about Marthoma church...I have not come across even a single reference to Marthomites in any of the programmes that I have seen," she comments.[45]

Most families, however, do not accuse cable television of religious bias. They do not consider stories of Hindus or Muslims as plots in films or non-religious serials even on *Doordarshan* to be problematic or something to be boycotted. Interestingly, Thenguvila Miriam, a Muslim, who refrains from watching any Hindu serials would not mind the stories of Hindus in films and serials. Such stories are considered part of the social milieu in which one lives. Cable television "has a political bias but not religious," defends Bini.[46] Anjilivelil Abraham is happy that at least one of the cable

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[41] Neduvellil Family. *Interview.* 15-06-2001

[42] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[43] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[44] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[45] Neduvellil. *Interview.*

[46] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

channels telecasts Christian programmes on Sunday morning. The Marthoma and Muslim families are, however, unanimous in their perception that *Doordarshan* discriminates against them in favour of the majority religious group. In this sense they feel marginalised and are reminded of their minority religious identity in watching television.

7.3.2 Watching Hindu religious programmes

Marthoma or Muslim families are not alone in alleging that *Doordarshan* is harbouring a pro-Hindu bias. By taking this stance, they actually join with many secular people, media scholars and even politicians who are gravely concerned about the use of television for partisan religious/political interests.[47] Having faulted *Doordarshan* for a lopsided coverage of religion favouring Hinduism, the response of Marthoma families to such programmes will be of interest in understanding the extent to which they bring in their religious identity when watching television. Do they desist from viewing them, and if not, why do they continue?

Almost all the Marthoma families in this study have watched Hindu religious programmes at some point in time. Some of them justify themselves by saying as Bini does: "We do not consider it wrong to see a programme just because it is of another religion."[48] Many Hindu religious serials are thus appreciated as familiar stories. "Isn't it *Puranam* [Epic]? We know the story," says Mini.[49] Hindu religious serials are mostly based on the epics like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* or on certain stories from them like *Jai Hanuman*, *Sri Krishna* and *Om Namashivay*. Most of these stories are either taught in school and college or communicated through various means such as stories told at home, children's magazines or even cartoon books.[50] The audio-visual representation of such stories is said to have created curiosity to 'see' and 'hear' them on screen. This alone is the reason why an otherwise reluctant Chekkulath Chechamma watched the *Ramayan* serial, if only for a few episodes. She recalls:

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[47] See Introduction (vi) and 1.3.3

[48] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

[49] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[50] For a discussion on children's magazines disseminating epic stories successfully in North India, see Frances W. Pritchett. 1995. "The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*". In *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press.

> We have seen it, but only very rarely. That was when it was first shown...Because you see...we have only heard about *Ramayanam*. Then out of curiosity to see what it's set up is...I watched it once or twice.[51]

Though many Marthomites could not watch the first telecast of *Ramayan* because it was on Sunday mornings, watching its re-telecast and other known Hindu stories were felt to be useful by many in this study. "We would understand more when it is acted out rather than when we read the story. So television helps to know and learn more about it," explains Bini.[52] As a result, some families found watching the programmes beneficial in their school/college education. "It is helpful. It can be useful in their studies as well," says Suma on allowing her children to watch such serials in an otherwise strict schedule of family viewing.[53] "In Malayalam literature we have these and many related stories. So watching them helps us to understand them more in class and also in exams," clarify Sunu and Soni.[54]

Another benefit of watching Hindu serials, a few pointed out, is to know more of the customs and practices of Hindus. Bini explains:

> We have an interest in seeing *Sri Ayyappan*. The reason is, many Hindus go on pilgrimage to Sabarimala from this neighbourhood...We have seen them going on foot. We cannot go there to see directly what is happening there. So there was an urge to know more about that and since we have an opportunity through this serial we were watching it.[55]

The above comments indicate that Marthomites have not boycotted Hindu serials just because of Hindu religion and they are conscious of the socio-cultural benefit of watching them.

The Marthomites, however, like the Muslim families, were hardly watching any Hindu serials at the time of the interviews. One of the reasons cited was their religious connotations. In other words, even though the epics and epic based serials are considered part of the cultural environment, Marthomites consider them to be of a different religion. The Chekkulaths, Edayilyaths and Karivedakaths have watched

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[51] Chekkulath. *Interview*. She also added, "I was unable to go to church those Sundays as I was having leg pain."

[52] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

[53] Niravath Family. *Interview*. 18-06-2001

[54] Niravath. *Interview*.

[55] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

only a few episodes of such serials for this reason. The Charuvils too, despite acknowledging its usefulness in learning about another religion, do not watch Hindu serials at all. One of the reasons cited was lack of time but, more importantly, the reason was religious, as revealed in the following exchange.

> *S*: Do you see programmes of Hindus?
>
> *Chacko*: No.
>
> *S*: This *Jai Hanuman*, *Mahabharat* etc.?
>
> *Ponnamma*: We have seen them sometime back.
>
> *Chacko*: We could not see them as it was on Sundays. We had to go to church.
>
> *S*: There are serials in the night. *Jai Hanuman*, *Om Namashivay* and the like.
>
> *Chacko*: Had seen once or twice. Somehow there was not much interest in them.
>
> *S*: Why no interest?
>
> *Chacko*: First of all, we don't get time to see them continuously. We may see this week but miss it next week. Moreover, it is more in Hindu line. Their history and things like that.[56]

Unlike Chacko, Anjilivelil Abraham will not watch the Hindu serials even if he has time. For him it is not proper for Christians to watch them. He argues:

> It can be said that serials like *Jai Hanuman* are only stories and are just like any other stories in that sense. It is only *puranam*. Even then I feel that it is not proper for a house that calls upon God to watch such programmes.
>
> *Kunjamma*: *Achayan* would not see them. [57]

Even though Abraham was the only one in this study who took such an extreme position, all the others had ceased watching Hindu serials at some point in time. Even those like the Inchakkalayils and Neduvellils who advocated the benefits of watching Hindu serials no longer watch them. It seems that many families just tolerated the Hindu serials when they had only *Doordarshan* and gladly embraced the possibility of watching non-Hindu programmes with the arrival of cable television. On this shift, Mercy says:

> When we had the other television [*Doordarshan*] we were watching these serials as they were in Malayalam. In fact after seeing some

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[56] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[57] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

> episodes we were fed up. Since we have taken cable, we have not been watching any of those serials. Now we don't know whether they are even showing those programmes.[58]

The Neduvellils acknowledge the same when Shaila says, "since we have cable we have not been interested in *Doordarshan* in which such programmes come. We discontinued it and do not have any interest now."[59] In other words, the Marthoma families in this study do not consider the Hindu serials something that they should offer their time. This lack of loyalty is significant, I would argue, taking into account their intense loyalty to secular programmes and channels as discussed in a previous chapter.[60]

The Marthomites become even more conscious of their religious identity when they come to watch what can be called "factual programmes" of Hindus.[61] Even those who did not mind watching Hindu serials, like Arackal Babu, would not watch live telecast of temple worship and practices. On how he distinguishes between factual and fictional programmes and how he adopts different positions towards them he explained:

> We do consider all these programmes as of Hindu religion. However there is a difference. For instance, when *Ponkala* is shown we know that it is live and temple-related. So I do not see that usually. There is nothing problematic in seeing that. Somehow it is not very interesting to me...may be because it may look like idol worship or something like that and hence contrary to our faith. The same has not been felt with *Jai Hanuman*. Yes I knew that it was a Hindu programme. Yet since the story was familiar I used to see.[62]

Like Babu, many others avoid programmes related to the temple or worship. They apparently try to make a faith statement in avoiding such programmes of another religion.

In addition to their avoidance of Hindu programmes, Marthomites have been unanimous in discrediting them as of no use to their faith. The maximum they were willing to concede was to treat these programmes as a possible religious resource for

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[58] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[59] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[60] See 5.3.1.1

[61] I categorise religious programmes into two for the sake of analysis, factual and fictional. Factual programmes are religious practices especially worship or other rituals. Fictional programmes are religious stories telecast in the form of serials, films or documentaries.

[62] Arackal. *Interview*.

Hindus. Even in that judgement they tend to assume an aggressive dogmatic position as Christians. As a result, except for one family, Marthomites were on the whole not keen to appreciate the religious significance of the Hindu programmes but for polemical purposes. Even the exceptional family, the Neduvellils, were half hearted at best in their appreciation, as revealed in the following comment by Jolly.

> When we see those worshipping idols, we will think, 'oh my God, they are worshipping stones like these.' Sometimes when we see their god appearing we would feel that even though they are worshipping mud and stone they have faith. So at times we feel that they are praying with faith. So it is a mixed feeling. Even though we feel that they are worshipping idols, we appreciate their faith.[63]

Apart from this mixed appreciation, the use of such programmes for many others is to establish the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism. Molly, one such viewer, explains her approach in the following exchange.

> *S*: So you have gained more knowledge about other religions!
>
> *Molly*: Yes, yes and hence we could even compare with our religion.
>
> *S*: Did you start respecting their religion because of viewing such programmes?
>
> *Molly*: In fact I lost my respect for Hinduism by seeing those programmes (laughs). It is stunt, stabbing and killing all the time. Then we would tell among ourselves that our God is about love and kindness. Look what a contrast with their gods who indulge in killing and violence. My friends listen to me when I make such comparisons.
>
> *S*: What do you tell them?
>
> *Molly*: In my class I tell other students...like...see God *Sri Krishna* was marrying just like that. How many wives he had! But Jesus Christ would not do like that...Like that I tell them.[64]

Even the rare occasions when children raised faith questions while watching Hindu religious serials were used for polemical purpose in some of the Marthoma families. A Hindu family like Suvarna Nivas said that when children ask questions while watching Hindu religious programmes, explanations were given by their mother or grandmother. Similar questions in the Kuzhivila family have, however, evoked a completely different response, as the following transcript reveals:

> *S*: What do you feel when you see a Hindu programme?

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[63] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[64] Muruppel. *Interview*.

Lilly: They show different gods. *Agni* is a god, so also is *Vayu*, like that. What is there for us to feel about it?[65]

Ginu: I do not feel anything. They may have faith in their gods and they may have power. But I don't think that they have any power more than our God does and we don't believe in them.

S: So what do you do when you see such programmes?

Ginu: I ask mother whether what they show is right. Are these really gods? Is it our God who created them or not? Questions like that I ask at times.

S: What does your mother say?

Ginu: (Laughs)

Lilly: I tell them that we don't have anything like that. We believe in the invisible God. All others are created by people and they are their handiwork. So worshipping such idols is wrong. We worship the invisible God…I say things like that.[66]

Most of the Marthoma families, like the Kuzhivilas, tend not to use Hindu religious programmes as a means for a greater understanding or appreciation of the Hindu religion. In this sense, *Doordarshan* has not opened up any possibility of dialogue or better understanding of Hindu religion among the non-Hindu audiences. It has only acted as a reinforcement of the Christian identity of the Marthomites.

Marthomites are not alone in bringing their religious convictions to watching Hindu programmes. The Muslim families in this study are also not committed viewers of such programmes. Thenguvila Miriam, unlike her husband, is least interested in Hindu serials.

S: Have you watched programmes like *Jai Hanuman*?

Miriam: I don't watch. That is…that is of Hindus…I don't like to see anything of Hindus. That is why…Aren't we Muslims?

Usman: I do watch.[67]

Valiyaveettil Noorudin, like Usman, watched some of the episodes of Hindu serials. But his wife, like Miriam, did not.

Marthomites, like Muslims, as the above discussion shows, are not committed viewers of Hindu serials. Their lack of interest in Hindu serials and complete avoidance of temple-related programmes along with their polemical approach

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[65] *Agni* and *Vayu* are fire and air respectively.

[66] Kuzhivila. *Interview*.

[67] Thenguvila. *Interview*.

suggest that Marthomites have recourse to their religious identity as Christians in watching Hindu programmes. Myths and traditional stories are watched as part of the Hindus' religious world which is familiar in verbal or literary form. Watching temple worship, however, is feared to be compromising their religious convictions. Watching Hindu religious programmes and their use are thus judged on their perceived impact on Christian faith.

If Marthomites bring in their religious identity when watching Hindu religious programmes do they adopt the same posture when it comes to Muslim religious programmes?

7.3.3 Watching Muslim religious programmes

There was unanimity among all families in this study about the paucity of Muslim religious programmes on television. "There isn't much to watch," concedes Vijayamma, a Hindu.[68] Even secular programmes based on Muslim stories are relatively few on television.

As in the case of Hindu programmes, the Marthomites are not committed viewers of Muslim programmes. Except for *Mappillappatt*, the Muslim folk songs, many of the Marthomites, like Hindu families, did not remember seeing anything related to Muslims on television. Only Kunjamma watched one serial: "I had seen one Muslim serial, *Noorjahan*. That was on Thursday night which I used to see alone," she says.[69] Otherwise the only family that is keen on seeing anything related to Muslims is the Kottarathils, especially Rosamma. Her reason for watching Muslim programmes and many others avoiding them is a corresponding familiarity or non-familiarity with Muslims. For Rosamma, Muslim programmes invoke memories of her childhood in a Muslim neighbourhood.

> I do not know why...but I do not like watching anything of Hindus. However I like more to watch Muslim songs and to hear their *vanguvili*[70] and the like.
>
> *S*: Why is it that you dislike Hindu and like Muslim programmes?
>
> *Rosamma*: I do not know why (laughs). It was like that even before television came. I do not know for certain the reason. It may be because there are Muslims in my native place. I heard from childhood

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[68] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview*.

[69] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

[70] Prayer call from the Mosque.

> their prayer-call in the morning, noon and the like. I have also seen them doing *niskara* wherever they are on hearing the *vanguvili*...We ourselves would feel something on hearing that...Their *palli*[71] was on a hill and hence we could hear clearly from our house. So probably because of that I like Muslim programmes. But this [Hindu] I do not like. May be because of my upbringing.[72]

If Rosamma likes to watch the few Muslim programmes on television because of the society of her childhood, Inchakkalayil Bini dislikes them for the same reason.

> *Bini*: (Laughs) See when *Bakreed* and things like that comes we do not know what it is. So from my childhood I do not know anything about them.
>
> *S*: So you could have learnt something about them!
>
> *Bini*: There are not many Muslims in this society. We do not have any touch with them either. Hindus on the other hand are with us. Even in my school there weren't any Muslims.
>
> *S*: So are you not missing a new way of knowing about Muslims?
>
> *Bini*: (Laughs) Generally I do not have much of an interest.[73]

The different responses of Rosamma and Bini in the above comments suggest that the few Muslim programmes are watched or avoided on the basis of one's familiarity with Muslims. Part of the reason for many of the Marthomites in this study having less interest in Muslim programmes may be due to this unfamiliarity with Muslims. As a result Marthomites do not seem to envisage Muslims as part of their neighbourhood either socially or imaginatively.[74]

The Hindu families also cited this lack of familiarity as a reason for not watching much of Muslims. Gouriamma in the following exchange reveals this:

> *S*: *Ammachy*, have you seen any Muslim programmes?
>
> *Gouriamma*: I haven't. I do not know anything of them either.[75]

Lack of familiarity, however, is only part of the reason for the Marthomites not watching Muslim programmes. Many of them avoid Muslim programmes, just as they do Hindu programmes, on the basis of religion. As the Charuvils explain:

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[71] Muslims use the term *palli* to denote a Mosque as Christians do a Church.

[72] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[73] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

[74] See 2.3.2

[75] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview*.

S: What about Muslim programmes?

Chacko: No. We haven't seen them.

Ponnamma: On Fridays, there are some of their programmes. Some prayers and things like that.

Chacko: Like the Hindu programmes, we just don't see this either. That is all.[76]

Thus, as in the case of the familiar Hindu programmes, most Marthomites, consider the unfamiliar Muslim programmes too to be of another religion and they tend to avoid them. Again, they do not use Muslim television programmes as a source for learning more about Muslims.

In short, with regard to watching programmes of other religions, that is Hindu and Muslim programmes, Marthomites are not committed viewers. A similar approach was also evident among the Hindu and Muslim families. Even the watching of programmes of other religions is attributed to cultural and social reasons rather than religious. In all these the influence of their religious positioning is beyond doubt.

7.3.4 Watching Christian religious programmes

The findings above may lead to the assumption that the Marthomites' approach to Christian programmes would be of special interest to them. Are they committed viewers of Christian programmes? Do they consider them as a resource for their faith?

One of the main hurdles in understanding these issues is the scarcity of Christian programmes on television. As with Muslim programmes, Christian programmes are almost absent on television. In the late 1990s a serial in Hindi called, *Dayasagar*, based on the life of Jesus was broadcast on *Doordarshan* only to be discontinued after a few episodes. At the time of the interviews there were only two televangelism programmes on one of the cable television channels- *Surya* TV- on Sunday mornings. One of these is by 'Jesus Calls' and the other is by 'Gospel for Asia.'[77]

The eagerness of Marthomites to watch Christian programmes becomes evident from their committed viewing of *Dayasagar*. The interest was such that even an irregular television viewer like Karivedakath Sheeba watched the few episodes of *Dayasagar*

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[76] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[77] 'Jesus Calls' organisation is founded by D. G. S. Dinakaran and 'Gospel for Asia' by K. P. Yohannan.

regularly with her two boys. The Niravaths, who like the Karivedakaths watch comparatively less television, also found time to watch this serial once they "had accidentally stumbled upon it."[78] Anjilivelil Soji, like some others who had no television set of their own during those days, went to her neighbour to watch it. Only Edayilyath Ashok and Abhilash, among the children, did not watch *Dayasagar*. "We have not taken time to watch that. On Saturday morning we go out to play," says Ashok.[79] But in general Marthoma families tried not to miss this serial. Unsurprisingly, they are unhappy and even angry about its abrupt suspension. They blame the *Doordarshan* authorities for this stoppage and consider it an indication of *Doordarshan*'s "neglect of Christians."[80]

They do, however, show less interest in the televangelism programmes on Sunday mornings. Presently, the above programmes are telecast from 6 a.m. when many of the children are still asleep and their mother busy working in the kitchen. As a result, only a few like Neduvellil Oommen and his daughter Shaila, Anjilivelil Abraham and his children and some of the elder members are able to 'see' and 'hear' these programmes. Some women, however, will try to 'hear' them while cooking.

Most Marthomites in this study do not watch the televangelism programmes because they clash with their preparation to go to church. This throws light on the extent to which Christian programmes on television are regarded as a resource for faith. Whether a family will watch Christian programmes or not depends on the timing of its telecast and its relationship to other resources for faith. The Marthomites, in this sense, give priority to church-going over watching Christian programmes on television. "I wished to have watched it more attentively. But since we will be busy going to church we do not get much to attend to it," says Molly, echoing many others in this study.[81] So, only the non-churchgoers, especially the old and the sick like Chekkulath Chechamma, Edayilyath Deenamma and Kottarathil Kunjumol, sit attentively and watch the preaching and prayers telecast on television.[82]

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[78] Niravath. *Interview*.

[79] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[80] See the various comments above on *Doordarshan* in this section.

[81] Muruppel. *Interview*.

[82] For a similar difference in the way church goers and non-church goers approach religious broadcasts in Sweden, see, Alf Linderman. 2002. "Religious Television in Sweden: Toward a More

However limited the Christian programmes are, and however little attention they have gained, Marthoma families suggested that only such programmes can evoke thoughts about God and Jesus Christ. In other words they identify these as Christian programmes and as resources for Christian faith. We think of God, "when we watch Christian programmes," says Nitty, like many others in this study.[83] Bini explains part of this process, by saying:

> When we hear Dinakaran preaching...or when Bible is read...then we can gain knowledge from that...We will know many things from the Bible...Then when there is prayer for the sick...we would have the feeling of God.[84]

Charuvil Chacko suggested that Christian programmes on television could be helpful for religious life. "Of course by seeing and listening to Christian programmes, our faith may increase," he proposes.[85] The old-aged who watch televangelism more on Sunday mornings found that it was good. In fact, Chekkualath Chechamma, who does not rate television very highly, considers the Sunday morning programmes some thing she likes. Edayilyath Deenamma, like Kottarathil Kunjumol, found it very helpful for her life. Deenamma says:

> I used to see Dinakaran's speech every Sunday. I would watch till the concluding prayer...till everything is over. She [Rosamma] will not see but hear from the kitchen. These boys wouldn't...they would be sleeping.
>
> *S*: What did you like most in those programmes?
>
> *Rosamma*: Prayer for the sick, and praying with tears for our needs.
>
> *S*: Did you feel like praying with them?
>
> *Deenamma*: Yes, I used to pray with them.[86]

If it is the factual type of spiritual programmes that enabled the old people to identify with their faith, some of the children like Karivedakath Titu found the serial *Dayasagar* (fictional) equally effective. For Titu:

> I liked Jesus walking over the sea most. I wish he were still here.

Balanced View of its Reception". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 301

[83] Ottaplackal Family. *Interview*. 22-06-2001

[84] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

[85] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[86] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

> *Sheeba*: Titu would say that if Jesus were here (laughs) he would have healed him.
>
> *S*: How would it be?
>
> *Titu*: Through prayer.[87]

The Niravath children also found that the broadcast was encouraging their faith.

> *Soni*: Those things are good to see. When you see *Dayasagar* it gives a good feeling. It has reality.
>
> *Sunu*: The crucifixion scenes were very natural and we felt that it was exactly like that. We discussed about faith when we were seeing that serial.[88]

In short, the above interview participants, like many others in this study and irrespective of their generational differences, told of how Christian programmes can have influence on their religious life.

More than an appreciation of Christian programmes, all families shared a desire to have more Christian programmes on television. Inchakkalayil Bini was not the only one to declare that they would watch Christian programmes everyday, if provided. She says:

> See if they say that there is a sermon by our Chrysostom *thirumeni*[89] or something about Maramon Convention, we will do all household chores in advance and will wait for it. Everybody has interest to see that. If such things are shown every day, every day we shall see them…It will be good to have such programmes.[90]

"If there is anything Christian, that is, sermons or songs, I like to watch them. We will avoid other programmes to watch them," affirms Rosamma.[91] Not all families, however, are keen like Rosamma to accept "anything Christian," and have expressed specific preferences. Thus Nitty prefers to have more choir songs on television than sermons. "We hear them on all Sundays. Don't we?" she says about sermons.[92] "The programmes on television should focus more on children. Good stories, songs and

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[87] Karivedakath. *Interview*.

[88] Niravath. *Interview*.

[89] Bishop Chrysostom is the Metropolitan of the Marthoma Church and is renowned for his sermons interspersed with thought-provoking humour.

[90] Inchakkalayil. *Interview*.

[91] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

[92] Ottaplackal. *Interview*.

sceneries...it should be interesting," advocates Sony.[93] "It must be film. Like *Jesus*," asserts another teenager, Ashok.

While all the interview participants asked for more Christian programmes on television they perceive different functions of such programmes. Charuvil Chacko, for instance, considers Christian programmes on television good for the youngsters. "Getting attention is the most important thing. Showing on television may attract attention of many. It may influence them in this way," he states.[94] Kunjamma thinks that television is good for evangelism and for old people. "Will it not be good for the old people who cannot go to church to have something to watch for an hour on television?" she asks.[95] The purpose of evangelism, however, is qualified by some to suggest that television should not be used for conversion. The Niravaths, one such family say:

> *Philip*: None of the programmes should aim at converting others. Bible says that we should convert. But we feel that the programmes should not hurt the feelings of others.
>
> *Suma*: It should tell about Jesus, but should not say they will be saved only if they join the church.[96]

What is required, in their opinion, are programmes that present an authentic understanding of Christianity for Christians and others.

While all the families have demanded audio-visual Christian programmes on television there were clear divisions among them, especially along the generational divide, when asked about keeping a visual image of Jesus in Church buildings.[97] The elders scorned the idea as totally unacceptable whereas the middle-aged were ambivalent. "I don't think that keeping an image of Jesus in the church is helpful. None of these pictures is real. So why should we keep them," asks Samuel, the eldest in this study.[98] "It may lead to idol worship," cautions Thomas, another elder. Thomas's son Babu, however, has a different perspective: "What I am saying is we have cross in the church. So if we have a picture there is no problem as long as we do

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[93] Niravath. *Interview*.

[94] Charuvil. *Interview*.

[95] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

[96] Niravath. *Interview*.

[97] I shall discuss its implications in the next chapter.

[98] Oonnukallil. *Interview*.

not offer prayers to it."[99] But Babu does not have the backing of all his generation. "There is no need to put pictures in the church," argues Miny, despite watching religious television and having pictures of Jesus in her house.[100] The children and youngsters, however, are overtly enthusiastic at such a prospect. None of them have shown any fear of possible idol worship unlike their grandparents and some of their parents. All of them endorsed having pictures in the Church buildings. "It is good to keep one in the church especially in the chancel. The photograph of the painting of the last supper. I am happy with it. It is a photo in which many gathered together," says Titu, one of the youngest interview participants in this study. Shaila, a youngster, argues:

> I very much like the picture of Jesus with outstretched hands kept in some of the Catholic retreat centres. Because, it gives me a feeling of Jesus inviting. We do not have any such things in our church. Except that people come together there is no feeling. But if you see a picture like the above you would feel that God is calling you.

Though one can only suspect whether it is seeing pictures in other church buildings or watching religious television that is responsible for the inclination of the younger generation towards images, it is beyond doubt that the residue of aversion to images is confined mostly to the elders and adult members of the Marthoma families.

The demand for having more Christian religious programmes on television, however, is made without any generational divide, as mentioned before. The reason seems to be obvious: "Isn't it about our God?" asks Molly, echoing what many others hinted at.[101] This sense of ownership towards one's own religious programmes is something that the Hindu and Muslim families have also exhibited. Miriam said she would give priority to "my" songs referring to *Mappillappatt*.[102] Waheeda, who does not watch television, said the same. "If it is *Mappillappatt* I may hear. Songs of my group, I hear."[103]

Again, both Hindus and Muslims, like the Marthomites, have also credited their own religious programmes with the potential to invoke feelings of God (*Iswara*/ *Allah*). I

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[99] Arackal. *Interview.*

[100] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview.*

[101] Muruppel. *Interview.*

[102] Thenguvila. *Interview.*

[103] Valiyaveettil. *Interview.*

have already mentioned the Suvarna Nivas using Hindu serials, at least at times, for explaining faith issues. "My mother tells them of the stories while watching," says Vijayamma on Hindu serials. She suggested (with a laugh) that her grandmother, like many other Hindus across the nations, used to consider God characters on screen and reel, as real.[104] "My grandmother…when *Sri Krishna* appears in serials, would get up (laughs) with folded hands, call *Bhagwane* [O God] and pay obeisance."[105] Gouriamma, Vijayamma's mother was also said to have called "*Bhagwane*" with devotion on watching "some very touching episodes in which he was offering *moksha* [salvation]."[106] However, neither Hindus nor Muslims show much interest in watching Christian programmes. While Thenguvila Usman said of seeing serials and films on Jesus, his wife Miriam did not watch any of them. Hindu families also in general were not loyal viewers of *Dayasagar*, though one of them said that she had been touched by the crucifixion scene in that serial.[107] None of them reported watching the televangelism programmes on Sundays.

Christian religious programmes, in short, are appreciated by the Marthomites unlike the Hindus and Muslims. The eagerness Marthomites expressed to watch Christian programmes is in direct contrast with their lack of loyalty to Hindu and Muslim programmes. Though resolute in retaining their traditional resources of faith, such as church-going, Marthomites hinted at the possibility of treating Christian programmes on television as another source for faith.

The discussion in this section makes it clear that families of different religions tend to approach religious programmes on television within their own religious framework and identity. This produces, on the one hand, a distinct pattern of watching religious programmes along the religious divide, but reveals on the other hand, a surprisingly similar influence of religion across the religious divide. All of them prefer to watch programmes of their own religion and pay only scant attention to those of other religions. In short, Marthomites, like other families, engage with religious television programmes as members of a particular religious group.

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[104] See 1.3.3

[105] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

[106] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

[107] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

7.4 Watching television and domestic religious practices

The discussion so far has been on the interaction between the practice of watching television and the religious faith of Marthoma families. Now I shift this focus from faith to religious practices and their interactions with television viewing in the domestic context. This shift acknowledges, on the one hand, a distinction between faith and practices, but affirms, on the other hand, the inseparability of the two in the public and private spheres of life. Both religious faith and religious practices must be addressed in their relationship to television viewing if we are to gain a holistic picture.

Asked about the distinctiveness of Marthomites, many families in this study have pointed to their faith in the invisible God and to visible practices such as prayer and worship. Faith, it was suggested, had no interaction with television, except in watching religious programmes. If faith and watching television are distinct and separate for the most part, does television interact with religious practices, for example worship and prayer?

Marthomites, as mentioned in Chapter Two, consider the practice of personal and family prayer both in the morning and the evening a cherished and traditional religious practice.[108] In other words people organise their everyday life within the temporal framework of prayer. It is into this temporal context that television was brought, necessitating the questions that I am dealing with in this chapter. How television viewing is incorporated into the framework of religious practices is an important indication of how television viewing and religion interact in Marthoma families. In short what I attempt here is to analyse the interaction between traditional religious practices and a modern media practice like watching television, all in the domestic context.

Marthomites have the tradition of family prayer in the morning and evening, but only two or three families in this study can take pride in their efforts to continuing it in the morning. The Ottaplackals and the Kuzhivilas have morning prayers regularly whereas the Kottarathils pray in the morning only on school working days. Some others too have morning prayers but with fewer members of the family. It is only the parents in the Anjilivelil and Charuvil families and the women in the Neduvellil

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[108] 2.3.1

family who come together to pray in the mornings. In all other families morning family prayer has become a thing of the past.

The discontinuity in morning family prayer in many families is significant for this discussion, not because it indicates the extinction of a traditional and cherished practice for many Marthomites, but because of its lack of any connection with the practice of watching television. As mentioned in Chapter Five, most of these families do not watch television early in the morning[109] so television viewing cannot be cited or blamed for causing the break in their morning family prayer practice. It is also significant because most families, as I show below, continue to have family prayer in the evenings despite watching television.

The use of television, however, has influenced the evening family prayer in two ways. Firstly, at least one family in this study has discontinued their prayer since the arrival of television and, secondly most others have shifted their timing of prayer. With the Inchakkalayils the evening family prayer has become a casualty of television viewing. Elikkutty and her daughter-in-law explain how this "problem" developed:

> *S*: If you compare your life before and after television, are there any changes?
>
> *Bini*: Yes, mainly one change: in family prayer (all three women laugh). There is very much change in that.
>
> *Elikkutty*: Change has come because there are serials. Everybody will see them and then sleep.
>
> *Bini*: A problem has occurred with prayer because there is a serial at half past six followed by news at seven. Then there is another serial at half past seven. Like that there are programmes one after another. So family prayer (pause). Then each one will pray their personal prayer before sleeping.
>
> *S*: Did you have regular family prayer before you bought television set?
>
> *Bini*: Yes.[110]

They are an exception, though important for the purpose of this study. All other families manage to have both family prayer and television viewing in the evenings. For some of them, however, television viewing has initiated a change in the timing of

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[109] 5.2.2

[110] Inchakkalayil. *Interview.*

prayer, and they no longer pray at the time they prayed in their pre-television days. In the days, that is, before the early 1980s it was customary in many families to have evening prayer with the lighting of the lamp at dusk. Still, there is a notion among some people that the time when lights are switched on or lamps are lit is prayer time. It is this tradition that Deenamma laments when she says, "because of television we cannot pray on time."[111] Abraham also recalled the tradition when he suggested that "television programmes on Hindu religion or their invocation should not emerge from the television set in a Christian home, especially at dusk. That is the time for prayer, whether you pray or not."[112] By shifting the prayer time, what television has changed in most families is its place as a marker point in the evening.

I am not suggesting, however, that television viewing is the sole reason for this change in the prayer time in all families. There are other factors as well and in some the shift happened even before the purchase of a television set. For instance, the Charuvils close their shop after eight o'clock and for quite some time they have been praying around nine. For some others, like the Anjilivelils, the children would prefer to pray after finishing their homework, again around nine, and for the Kuzhivilas and Ottaplackals family prayer is impossible at seven because one of their members does not return home until around eight o'clock.

For many families, however, it is indeed the practice of watching television that caused a shift in their prayer time. The Neduvellils explain this change :

> *S*: What time do you pray in the evening?
>
> *Susamma*: That is between eight and half past.
>
> *S*: Any reason for that particular timing?
>
> *All*: (Laugh)
>
> *Susamma*: There is no serial at that time.
>
> *Jolly*: Nobody wants the programme that comes at that time.
>
> *S*: Were you praying at the same time from olden days?
>
> *Shaila*: This is the schedule for some time.
>
> *Susamma*: First of all, there will be visitors and telephone calls. So we will not be able to keep a fixed time.
>
> *S*: But you have just said that you pray at a fixed time and there are no serials at that time!

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[111] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[112] Anjilivelil. *Interview*.

> *Jolly*: I will tell you, *atchan*. There is news at seven. From half past seven to eight there is *Sthree* serial. Watching that has become an unavoidable schedule. From half past eight to nine there is another serial *Swararagam* followed by another one, *Sapatni*. Since we have started watching them, we would like to continue. So the only free slot is between eight and half past eight.[113]

Like the Neduvellils, many other families do not stick to the traditional timing of prayer and have shifted it to a convenient time-slot depending on their preferred television programmes. The Mullumkuzhys have, in fact, two 'free slots' for prayer: "Either before seven," says Mincy, "or only after half past nine." Even when they pray before seven, it is not in conformity with the earlier practice of entering into an unknown night with prayer but for the convenience of watching television. "Yes," Mercy agrees, with a laugh, "It is in order to see the serials."[114]

If the Neduvellils, Arackals and the Kuzhivilas have found their 'prayer slot' in the evenings and fixed it in time, some others, especially the women-only households, find it hard to organise prayer at a particular time.[115] For them, finding a time for prayer has become another area of daily struggle with their children, "another headache." Saramma and her mother-in-law describe this predicament:

> *Saramma*: We used to pray around quarter to seven or seven before we bought this television set.
>
> *S*: So there is a change in the timing of prayer after you had this set?
>
> *Deenamma*: Yeah, now the timing has changed. Now we cannot pray on time.
>
> *S*: How has it changed?
>
> *Saramma*: Now if we prepare to pray about eight, then these boys would say, 'this is a good serial, we will pray after that.'
>
> *Deenamma*: When we ask them to sing they would say, 'Just a minute, let this programme be over,' etc. Like that they will say and time will go. Sometimes we may get to pray only around half past nine.[116]

Rosamma, from another women-only household, has become "strict nowadays and manages to keep prayer," to the new schedule.[117] Karivedakath Sheeba, on the other

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[113] Neduvellil. *Interview*.

[114] Mullumkuzhy. *Interview*.

[115] This indicates that it is not merely a problem of the presence of television but also the absence of the father at home.

[116] Edayilyath. *Interview*.

[117] Kottarathil. *Interview*.

hand, has practically banned watching television in the evening because in her experience television was a "nuisance for prayer." She elaborates:

> We had problems with our prayer time earlier. If children are allowed to continue watching they will go on and on and then would fall asleep. It happened many a time and I used to think that television is a nuisance for prayer. When they were watching, I had to call them again and again for prayer...I used to show some lenience during vacation.[118]

For Sheeba it is comparatively easy to enforce discipline because her children are small. For others like the Edayilyaths it seems that 'leniency' cannot be confined to vacation time. Finding time for prayer continues to be a point of negotiation and parental assertion in some of these families.

If some families have found a time slot for prayer amidst their television viewing and if some others continue to struggle over it, one family has avoided any trouble. The Chekkulaths do not labour to choose the programmes to be avoided to have their family prayer because they pray when the power goes off. In other words, the Electricity Board of Kerala decides their prayer time. Even though its timing changes on a weekly basis, the power cut is a regular feature for many months in Kerala, providing a prayer slot for the Chekkulaths.

> *Chechamma*: With TV, now the elders in this neighbourhood say that prayer is done during the power cut (laughs) and ask whether we are doing the same.
>
> *Sali*: (Laughs)
>
> *S*: Are you doing the same?
>
> *Sali*: Yes, now it is done according to the power cut (laughs). Every week it changes, but we will know the time beforehand and pray accordingly. We light candle and read Bible.
>
> *S*: What do you do when there is no power cut?
>
> *Sali*: Earlier power cut was for half an hour and we used to pray at that time. Now we do not have it everyday. So we pray at half past eight. By that time the serial will be over.[119]

In addition to the change in the prayer time, the Chekkulaths also suggested that television viewing has brought pressure on the duration of their praying. No other families, however, experience any such reduction. The Kuzhivilas still follow their

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[118] Karivedakath. *Interview*.

[119] Chekkulath. *Interview*.

old format which lasts for half an hour and many others do keep with their customary practice. That means, most families follow the tradition of prayer, if not its timing, by sitting on the floor and in the format of singing, Bible reading and extemporaneous prayer.

Like Marthomites, Hindu and Muslim families too find the pressure of television viewing on their domestic religious practices in the evenings. For Hindus, *namajapam*[120] is to be done at *moovanthy* (dusk) and at dawn whereas for the Muslims *niskara* is performed at fixed times coordinated with the prayer call from the mosque. That means shifting the timing of prayer is not an option for them. The Pullolis and the Valiyaveettils stick to this. The former will do *namajapam* around half past six in the evening and the latter will have *niskara* at half past six and at eight. In some other families, however, some members watch television while others engage in prayer. The Suvarna Nivas family adopts both methods. Sometimes they switch on the television set to watch the evening news only after their children finish their *namajapam*. On most days, however, they will be asked to sing less loudly so that the parents can watch news from the beginning. As Vijayamma explains:

> If they sing aloud, then we will not be able to hear the news. Otherwise we have to let them complete the *namajapam* and should put television on only around quarter past seven. But by that time all main news would be over. This could be a problem for Hindu families...I am concerned and recently I have been thinking of this clash.[121]

Interestingly, for this family, it is the parents who want to watch television at the time of prayer. In other houses it is the children who watch television, leaving their mother to perform the evening prayer. Miriam "loses concentration when *niskara* and television viewing happen simultaneously," so sometimes her "children would lower the sound of television and sometimes they would switch it off."[122] In the Punnooreth family, which is a women-only household, the boys continue watching television while their mother Ammini does the evening *pooja* in another room. Besides domestic prayers, some of these families suggested that their temple-going has been slightly affected by television viewing.

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[120] Namajapam means, literally, repeating the name of God. It is a prayer song.

[121] Suvarna Nivas. *Interview.*

[122] Thenguvila. *Interview.*

The analysis so far in this section shows that most Marthomites continue with their evening family prayer with or without changing its timing. In this sense, except for one family, prime time television has only re-scheduled prayer time rather than replaced it in the domestic context. The Marthomites, unlike some of the Hindu and Muslim families, switch off television during family prayer and continue with their traditional format of praying as a family. Most of them also keep the duration of the prayer. At the same time I have also shown the pressure of television viewing on family prayer. In at least one Marthoma family evening prayer has become a casualty of television and in some other families organising prayer has become an everyday parental task. It is also important to note that television has usurped the position of family prayer as a marker point in the evenings. Chechamma's lament that, "I am getting old and do not know what happens to it in their [her daughter's] time,"[123] highlights the challenge between prime time television and prayer time in the domestic context.

7.5 Conclusion

The effort in this chapter has been to understand how Marthoma families handle television viewing and their religious life in the domestic context. This has become apparent in three ways in the above discussion. Firstly, Marthomites, like others, categorise television programmes into secular and religious and do not consider secular television to provoke any religious issues. The choice of watching secular television is not conditioned by religious affiliation, it is claimed, and in turn it is not considered to have any influence on faith. Religious faith, on the whole, is neither promoted nor eroded by watching secular programmes.

Secondly, Marthomites, like others, become conscious of their religious identity when it comes to religious programmes on television. They, like Muslims, position themselves as belonging to a minority religious community in India by criticising television, especially *Doordarshan,* as pro-Hindu and they accuse it of marginalising and caricaturing them. Moreover, in spite of citing the socio-cultural benefits of watching programmes of other religions, their lack of commitment to watching them on the basis of religion, and their tendency to use them for polemical purposes among other things show the influence of their religious identity. This also finds

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[123] Chekkulath. *Interview.*

expression in their desire to watch Christian programmes on television (as long as they do not compromise their traditional sources of faith like church-going) and their demand for Christian programmes of different types which present an authentic understanding of Christian faith in an attractive way. Their readiness to consider such programmes to be an additional source for their religious life without any generational difference, unlike of putting visual images in worship places, is significant. Thirdly, they try, with varying degrees of success, to retain the practice of evening family prayer which is another mark of their religious identity, along with their television viewing. In most families, family prayer in the evenings is still continued, even though prime time television has re-scheduled the prayer time in most families and replaced it in one.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that Marthomites show similarity with Hindu and Muslim families on all issues discussed above. The religious faith and practices of all families in this study in some way influence their television viewing. In this way, all families in this study show similarity on the interaction between television and religion in the domestic context, but remarkably divergent use of religious programmes. Each religious group watches programmes of their own religion with commitment, with a sense of ownership and as a resource for faith. Conversely, they show least commitment to programmes of other religions, especially those with which they are unfamiliar. In short, I have suggested in this chapter that in a multi-religious context religious programmes reinforce and amplify the religious identity of the television audiences rather than opening up possibilities for dialogue and understanding.

This is the last chapter of Part II of this thesis in which I have been telling the story of television in the Marthoma households. I have analysed the process by which television viewing has become an embedded practice for the Marthomites and how it interacts with various aspects of their everyday life. Television viewing has re-scheduled certain aspects of life, reorganised a few others and reinforced still others since it gained entry into the domestic context. While influencing the domestic life, television has been domesticated itself. What is the overall significance of these things taken together? What does it mean to the Marthomites and to the television, religion and culture debate? It is these issues that I take up in Part III.

Part III
Marthoma Christians and television viewing: Continuity and change

Conclusion

Prime Time and Prayer Time: Television, Religion and Everyday Life of Marthoma Families

i Introduction

In this study of the interactions between television, religion and the practices of everyday life, I have argued that Marthoma Christians welcomed television and incorporated it into their everyday life without its seriously undercutting their culture and religion. The comparatively recent introduction and spread of television in Kerala has provided a unique opportunity to explore the processes through which television was welcomed and watched by this minority religious group who nursed an apprehension and a religiously couched opposition to another audio-visual medium, i.e. film. The inclusion of Hindu and Muslim families has helped not only to analyse whether the Marthoma families differ from those of other religions in their television practice but also to gain insights into the interaction between religion and television in a multi-religious context.

The use of qualitative, open-ended and semi-structured interviews with carefully selected fifteen Marthoma, three Hindu and two Muslim families has provided an in-depth focus and wealth of qualitative data on their lived lives and television use. This does not, however, mean that all the findings of this research can be generalised to all families in Kerala. The data did, however, provide interpretive possibilities on the one hand and pointers to further research on the other.

i.i A thumbnail sketch of the thesis

In the first four Chapters of this thesis I laid the foundations for this study. I presented the research questions in the Introduction explaining their relevance to television research both in India and elsewhere. I highlighted the need to triangulate research on television, everyday life and religion showing that religion is taken for granted or ignored by many audience researchers. Most researchers/scholars exploring the relationship between religion and television focus more on the production and content of programmes than on the audiences and their lived world. Conducting interviews with families of three different religious persuasions watching multi-religious programmes on recently acquired television sets in a religiously pluralistic society was suggested as a tool for addressing some of the problems and filling a gap in the present media, religion and culture debate.

In Chapter One television viewing in India was introduced by providing a brief history of the emergence of television viewing as a domestic practice. I suggested that the increase in channels and programmes, especially in the vernacular with the advent of cable television, and a decline in community viewing have contributed to the spread of domestic television viewing. In Chapter Two I introduced the main group under study in this research—the Marthoma Christians in Kerala. Marthomites, I suggested, have adapted and accommodated various religious, cultural and media practices with which they have come into contact while shunning any practices which employ images or icons. In Chapter Three I described and defended the research process and interview method claiming that qualitative interviews were best suited to this study. I also gave a profile of each of the participant families to acknowledge their part in this study, before self-reflectively analysing my part in the whole process.

In Part II, that is from Chapters Four to Seven, I analysed the interview transcripts in order to discuss the families' perceptions of four major themes. In Chapter Four I described the arrival of television into the domestic mediascape of the Marthoma families. Marthomites, who considered cinema as orgy, were fascinated with television for one reason or another, and went to great lengths to purchase a television set, helped considerably in the process by a lack of religious sanction against the medium. Once entered, television is perceived to have reorganised the domestic mediascape in favour of audio-visual communication, initiating thereby what can be called a culture shift for the Marthoma families. In Chapter Five, I focussed on television viewing in the domestic context and found that it has emerged as a routine everyday family practice for most of the families. Analysing various aspects of watching television I demonstrated in this chapter that television viewing is shaped by the domestic context on the one hand and by the social, cultural and religious identities of the families on the other.

In Chapter Six, the interaction between television viewing and selected everyday practices was analysed. I demonstrated that Marthomites incorporate television into their everyday lives with varying degrees of continuity and change. In Chapter Seven, I focussed on the interaction between television and religion and suggested that secular television has not been perceived to have any relationship to faith even though it has influenced the prayer time of many families. Religious television, on the other hand, amplifies the religious identity of the viewers along their religious

divide but has left untouched their traditional resources of religion and religious priorities.

I shall now, by way of concluding this study, revisit the main research questions to highlight the interesting lessons learnt from this study and to reflect on their implications. Instead of repeating the conclusions of the previous chapters, I address the initial research questions bringing the preceding chapters into dialogue with each other. For this purpose I proceed in two sections. In the first and major section, I discuss three significant themes, Marthoma Christians and television, television and everyday life, and television and religion. In the second section I consider the possible and probable implications of this study and suggest avenues for further research.

ii Marthomites and television: Why 'No' to cinema, but 'Yes' to TV?

My research interest was prompted partly by the seemingly contradictory attitude of the Marthomites to cinema compared with television. This thesis confirms that Marthomites (like Muslims, and unlike Hindus) indeed have religious objections to cinema. Even so, some of the young men, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, ventured to the cinema without their parents' permission, ironically, on the pretext of participating in religious meetings.[1] This study also confirms that they welcomed television into their homes without much hesitation and free from religious objections.[2]

Why have Marthomites said 'No' to cinema, but 'Yes' to television? From what the families said, both explicitly and implicitly in Chapters Four and Five, various reasons can be identified for their divergent posturing towards cinema and television. I highlight three of them below.

Firstly, television is considered different from cinema. The difference is mainly in their viewing context, audience composition and control while viewing. Marthomites consider the cinema to be a place where they have no control either of the audience composition, or of the contents of the films. As suggested in Chapter Four, as "many types of people," if not "gentiles" and "unbelievers" come to the cinema, it is a place

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[1] 4.2.3

[2] 4.3

considered to have the potential for leading people into bad company and bad behaviour. Though not explicitly stated, there may also be a fear of exposing women and children to the danger of unknown men in the dark interior of the theatre. Moreover, after having travelled the distance to the cinema and purchased tickets, one could not be certain whether there are "unsuitable" or "*cheetha*" scenes that they would prefer to avoid. Considering this lack of control in the context, audiences and contents of the programmes one can understand why some of the families are still not willing to overcome the stigma and religious objections to the cinema. Cinema, in short, continues to evoke fear, vulnerability and shame.

Television, on the other hand is acclaimed to have none of the problems of cinema. Television viewing at home saves the families from the need to travel, the cost of tickets, and the risk of mixing with "various types of people." There is a confidence in the audience composition since it is mostly family members or at most 'guests' from the neighbourhood who assemble to watch television at any given point in time. As a result, apart from the possibility of an occasional conflict over the choices of programme, there is no fear about the "type" of audience and their behaviour. In other words the domestic context of television, unlike that of cinema, is considered to be a safeguard from indecent associations and the possibility of indulging in immoral behaviour. This is what made Charuvil Chacko assert with confidence, as discussed in Chapter Four, that "when the parents and children sit at home and see a film that does not lead them...[astray]."[3]

Television infuses confidence over its content. The discussion in Chapter Five revealed that television is considered to be a family medium and the preference and avoidance of programmes are, to a great extent, based on their suitability to a family audience. Some families even had confidence, however naïve it is, that broadcasting authorities and producers would telecast only programmes appropriate for a family audience. This is epitomised in Muruppel Molly suggesting, in a quote cited in Chapter Five that "cable operators generally broadcast family films."[4] A similar notion that serials would not bring any embarrassing moments to family audiences by bringing sexy scenes can be discerned underlying their acceptance as safe. There is an additional confidence that any "unsuitable" scenes could be censored with the

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[3] 4.4.3

[4] 5.3.2.5

remote control or by part of the audiences boycotting them. In short, the families assume that they have more control over television's contents. Television, unlike cinema, evokes in them a sense of confidence and power.

This study points out that the difference with which Marthomites regard television and cinema is so sharp that despite having begun to watch films on television, many adult members continue to hold their parents' apprehension about visiting the cinema though with less assertiveness. They may not endorse their previous generation in branding cinema an orgy, nevertheless they pass on their strictures to their children and grandchildren despite allowing them to go to the cinema. The Neduvellils feeling "shame", as discussed in Chapter Four, at the prospect of others seeing their daughter coming from the cinema is a case in point.[5] Marthoma families do not seem to be enthusiastic about being known as film-goers even in the twenty-first century.

Secondly, Marthomites said 'Yes' to television not just because it is different from cinema but because it offers more than films. In fact, the families in this study implied that television fulfils the role of many other media at home, even newspaper and radio to a great extent. Besides films, Marthomites use television to watch news, soaps, songs and sports among many programmes. By providing such a variety of programmes television seems to have become a "jack of all trades" and the principal medium in these households. As identified in this study, besides being a cause of television's attraction, this multi-purpose function of television may also explain the reorganisation of the mediascape of Marthoma families.[6]

With television around, I demonstrated in Chapter Four the use of all other mass media has either been discontinued or changed its function, or paled into insignificance. Since the acquisition of television, in many households the newspaper is rarely read for news, only for obituaries or the television-guide; radio has become a forgotten medium for many of its previous users. The use of audiocassette players and videocassette players has met with the same fate. Television has ushered in for the first time the opportunity to watch audio-visual material including films. In this sense, it can be argued that it is not the habit of visiting cinemas that prompted Marthomites to buy a television set, but film viewing is one of the perks of having a television at home. In other words, television has a higher priority than films.

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[5] 4.4.3

[6] 4.4

Thirdly, in addition to its difference from and advantages over cinema, the tag of modernity and mobility attached to television seems to have made it more glamorous and desirable. In other words, television is considered prestigious rather than shameful. The prestige of having a modern technological gadget and the glamour it gained as part of the luggage of Gulf-returnees seem to have increased the fascination television has acquired by virtue of the possibility of "seeing and hearing," people, places and programmes which are otherwise inaccessible.

Television, this study affirms, has come to be regarded as an essential piece of household furnishing. This perhaps explains why the sexton in my former parish,[7] and many families as discussed in Chapter Four, took great pains and made sacrifices to buy a television set and there are television antennae on the roofs of even ramshackle huts in the slums. A home needs a television! This appears to have become the trend in Kerala. If film-going was scandalous thirty years ago, as many families reminded us in Chapter Four, the times have changed to the extent of Suvarna Nivas Vijayamma suggesting that it was almost a scandal not to have a television once they built a modern house.

In other words despite the similarity of television and cinema as audio-visual media Marthomites have divergent dispositions towards them. Cinema continues to evoke shame, fear and apprehension whereas television evokes confidence, enjoyment and prestige. This attitude of forbidding cinema on the one hand while accepting television (films) on the other may encourage one to doubt whether this continuing aversion to cinema is reflective of a lingering anti-theatre tradition.[8] It may also be cited as yet another sign of a hypocritical life, that is, consuming something at home which is prohibited in public. But this research has shown that it is the domesticity and the consequent control over television that have made it appealing to the Marthomites and other families in this study. Similar trends have been observed elsewhere. For instance, Quentin J. Schultze has suggested that in the United States, television elicits concerns but not "as pervasively as film."[9] He assumes that in

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[7] Introduction (i)

[8] 2.4.1

[9] Quentin J. Schultze. 1992. *Redeeming Television: How Television Changes Christians and How Christians can Change Television*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. p. 149

America television was tolerated in comparison to film "probably because television is so popular, and is viewed in the home instead of a theater."[10]

iii Television and everyday life

The second major question in this research was, "How do Marthomites watch television in their everyday lives?" I argued that Marthomites perceive television to have become part of their everyday life without overpowering their lives or eroding their domestic practices. Television is accommodated and adapted into domestic life and is not considered to be a threat with regard to many practices.[11]

iii.i Television and domestic space

One of the changes that television is perceived to have initiated in the domestic context is the reorganisation of the domestic space. In Chapters Three and Four I showed how the arrival of television required different uses of the domestic space where there was no built-in space for a television set.[12] Many families found space for television either by reorganising the space or rearranging the furniture with respect to the orientation of the television set. The television set is placed in such a way that it is the centre of attention and focus in the living room of many houses. In this sense television has reorganised the geography of the living room. In some other houses television has even initiated a new concept of space and space organisation by having a special "viewing room."

Though television sets have come to take pride of place in the domestic context, the placement of the Bible, song books and liturgy books in many Marthoma homes either beneath or above the television cupboard, in hindsight, appeared to be symbolic of the importance given to both religious and television practices (prime time and prayer time) and to the way both have been incorporated into everyday life.

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[10] Schultze. *Redeeming Television*. p. 149

[11] See Chapter Two. Accommodation and adaptation operate in other aspects of life in Kerala as well. For instance, "A survey of teenage girls in Kerala reveals that 74 percent think a boyfriend is a good idea but 98 percent prefer an arranged marriage–in a classic replay of the adage that the more things change, the more they remain the same!" Hindustan Times. http://autofeed.msn.co.in/clippath2/innerHTMLs/{77A5F490-5EA6-4592-878A-4ECF9ED6141C}.asp. Accessed on Tuesday, December 02, 2003 at 15 hrs

[12] 3.3, 4.3.4

Watching in a shared space determines partly what is watched. Physical aspects such as the domestic space itself, number of sets at home, placement of the television set etc. all contribute to viewing patterns. J. Bryce and H. Leichter note that "some aspects of the family environment determine the nature of the television context by influencing when the medium is viewed and by whom.[13] The placement of television in a common space reinforces television's status as a family medium. It should be added, however, that this perception of television as a family property is not changed even when the set is placed elsewhere, say a bedroom, because there is no strictly privatised space in many households in this study.

Marthomites prefer to keep television for collective use, as suggested in Chapter Five.[14] Of course, reliance on a single set in a common space does cause conflicts over viewing choices leading either to patriarchal assertions of power between couples or rough and tumble among siblings.[15] It may also disturb the sleep of the elder members in some families.[16] Despite such irritants which are either resolved as on other occasions or accepted as part of everyday life, Marthomites seem to be happy to watch television together. It may be safe to suggest that unlike in some other parts of the world, the possibility of Marthoma families purchasing additional sets appears to be very remote even in the near future. The television set, as we have seen in Chapter Five, is for the whole family.[17]

Since there is only one set, and that in a common place, television provides opportunities for the family to come together. In this television seems to have changed the number of times Marthomites meet together in the domestic space, which in earlier times was mainly for morning and evening prayers.[18] Television prompts more proximity among family members even though the degree to which

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[13] J. Bryce and H. Leichter. 1983. "The Family and Television: Forms of Mediation". *Journal of Family Issues* 4. p. 321

[14] 5.2.1

[15] 5.4

[16] 6.2

[17] In the West, television viewing is increasingly being individualised. See David Morley. 2000. *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London: Routledge. p. 90. For his earlier assertion, as cited in the Introduction (v.i), that the basic unit of television viewing is the family, see David Morley. 1992. *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge. p. 138

[18] 2.3.1

such get together enhances interpersonal interaction is a matter of contention at least in some families.[19]

iii.ii Television and domestic time

Lives are usually structured by a rhythmic pattern in the way and time at which daily schedules, that is what to do and when, are organised. Television has brought in a new concept of time for the Marthomites: television time. Media scholars like Paddy Scannell postulated that watching television regulates to a large extent the family organisation of time.[20] Leichter and colleagues observed that television works "round the clock" in American families fashioning their daily routines.[21] Buddenbaum and Stout pointed out that "in the average U.S. home, the television set is on for at least six hours every day."[22] My research shows that for the Marthomites, even though television does not organise time round the clock, it has come to account for two to four hours of their daily time. Unlike a few years ago television has come to account for a significant segment of time in the daily life of many Marthomites.

On a normal working day television has become a marker in the afternoon and even more so in the evening schedule of the families. Television time is regarded as leisure time providing them with an occasion to relax and rest. James Lull has observed that television time has become a common feature of all cultures into which television has been introduced.[23] In this sense, Marthomites having television time is not exceptional. However, what this present research has highlighted is the influence of their public worship (prayer time) on television viewing (prime time). As suggested in Chapter Five, the television time of the Marthomites is shaped, in

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[19] 6.5

[20] Paddy Scannell. 1996. *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

[21] Leichter, H., Ahmed, D., Barrios, L., Bryce, J., Larsen, E. and Moe, L. (1985). "Family Contexts of Television". *Educational Communication and Technology Journal* 33. pp. 26–41(no page number for the quotation), quoted by Leoncio Barrios. 1988. "Television, Telenovelas, and Family Life in Venezuela". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 65

[22] Judith M. Buddenbaum and Daniel A. Stout. 1996. "Religion and Mass Media Use". In *Religion and Mass Media: Audiences and Adaptations*, ed. Daniel A. Stout and Judith M. Buddenbaum. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p.13. The average American adult spends about 1600 hour a year watching television according to the Television Bureau of Advertising. 2001. http://www.tvb.org/tvfacts/tvbasics/basics10.html. Accessed on Wednesday, 06 August, 2003 at 16 hrs

[23] James Lull. 1988. "Constructing Rituals of Extension Through Family Television Viewing". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage. p. 244

addition to their programme and channel loyalty, by their commitment to attend public worship and community religious meetings. Unlike the Hindu and Muslim families, the prime time television on Sunday is prayer time for the Marthomites.[24]

iii.iii Television and family entertainment

Family entertainment is something new that television has brought into the Marthoma households. I have argued that Marthomites, like families of other religions, perceive television as an enjoyable pastime. In fact, in addition to its 'audio-visual' nature, that is the possibility to see and hear, what television has specifically brought to the Marthoma families are cultural products suitable for enjoyment and passing time.

Even though television was introduced in India for the purpose of development oriented goals, Marthomites do not perceive it as a development medium. This may be because in Kerala television was not introduced as part of the initial public service broadcast symbolised by the SITE and Kheda projects,[25] but as part of the popularisation of television as a domestic medium for entertainment and information. Moreover, *Doordarshan* broadcasts had limitations in appealing to the Kerala audiences mostly because of its predominant use of the Hindi language. Television became popular with the introduction of more localised and vernacular telecasts, initiated mainly by the arrival of cable television which was slanted towards a "regime of pleasure"[26] rather than development. Television at the moment is used more for entertainment all over the country.

In this thesis I argued that at least in some households it is television that has helped the families to have organised leisure time, which otherwise was used "going around the house and the land," as the Pullolis suggested in Chapter Six.[27] There is an effort in many households to keep television strictly as a leisure time activity. This has found expression in at least two ways with the interview participants. Firstly, unlike in many other parts in the world, the Kerala families have not been prone to keep television as an environment or as a secondary activity while doing domestic

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[24] 5.2.4

[25] 1.2.2

[26] John Hartley. 1992. *Tele-ology: Studies in Television*. London: Routledge. p. 138. I do not, however, share the pejorative sense in which he uses this term.

[27] 6.7

chores.[28] Usually the television set is switched on only when there is a committed audience and, except for an occasional conversation, viewing is a much more concentrated activity. Secondly, the contradictory opinion among parents and children on television's influence on the studies of children and homework seems to be a question of their disagreement on demarcating the leisure time.

On the basis of this research it could be suggested that Marthomites consider television to be an entertainment medium providing entertainment for the whole family. This may explain why many of them prefer to watch programmes that make them laugh rather than cry. This suggestion, however, requires some explanation. As Joli Jensen has rightly pointed out the categorisation of the functions of television into education, information and entertainment has some ideological presuppositions.[29] There is also a resultant value judgement prioritising them in descending order giving education the most importance and entertainment the least. When I suggest that television is an entertainment medium it is not in an exclusive or pejorative sense but to highlight the major contribution of television to the family entertainment in the Marthoma households.[30]

From the discussion in Chapters Two and Four, it is clear that Marthomites were reading newspapers or hearing radio in their pre-television days, but what they had not accessed before were cultural products such as drama, film, music etc. because they were not going, especially as a family, to such performances. They also were not participants in or observers of the traditional art forms like *Kathakali.* These were either performed in public places at night or performed as part of temple festivals making them undesirable or inaccessible to the Marthoma families. It is to this cultural situation that television brought choices of entertainment material. In this sense, television has become a major source for the Marthomites to see entertaining programmes.

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[28] See 6.7 for relevant references.

[29] Joly Jensen. 1990. *Redeeming Modernity: Contradictions in Media Criticism*. Newbury Park: Sage.

[30] For a discussion on television entertainment as an active audience practice, see Richard Dyer. 1992. *Only Entertainment*. London: Routledge.

iii.iv Television and everyday practices

Television colonises free time, it has been suggested.[31] Even though Marthomites claimed that they watch television only in their free time, that is, when "time permits"[32] their accounts reveal that they find time to watch television. As a result television viewing has varying influence on their everyday routines, this study reveals. I must hasten to add that there is no family in this study for whom all their daily practices have been influenced or any family who could say that all their old schedules remain intact. What is clear from this study is that television's influence or its absence depends partly on non-media factors such as the composition of the family, work-pattern of its members, family dynamics and family habits. As a whole, television re-schedules, reinforces and retains various practices and aspects of daily life in the families in this study.

As I demonstrated in Chapter Six, television re-schedules some daily habits, e.g. sleeping and eating. Bedtime is delayed for half an hour to one and half hours and, since rising time remains unchanged, sleeping time has been reduced. Meal time has become television time, especially for the children. Another practice that is re-scheduled in most of the households is the practice of family prayer.[33] Prime time television decides the prayer time in the evenings for many families.

What television has reinforced in the domestic context, in addition to the preference for local culture (vernacular language), is mainly parental authority, patriarchal power and the generation gap. As I demonstrated in Chapter Five, television reinforces local culture as exemplified in the preference for Malayalam language programmes/ channels. While television viewing preferences have their share of ambiguity, as shown in the case of the emergence of a home channel in each family, what has been revealed beyond doubt is the influence of the vernacular language in television viewing. This, I have suggested, adds voice to the call for a re-examination of the media imperialism theory and raises questions about government plans to use television for the popularisation of Hindi.[34]

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[31] See H. Sahin and J. P. Robinson. 1980. "Beyond the Realm of Necessity: Television and the Colonization of Leisure". *Media, Culture and Society* 3, no. 1. For a discussion on television and leisure-time, see Conrad Lodziak. 1986. *The Power of Television*. London: Frances Pinter. pp.128-158

[32] 5.2.2

[33] 7.3

[34] 5.3.1

Similar to what Jan-Uwe Rogge and Klaus Jensen found in West Germany, this study found that children have more technological competence than their parents with regard to television thereby denting the parental monopoly on decision-making power.[35] In many families it is the children who take decisions on film choices, as I have shown in Chapter Five. However, this relocation of competence does not mean that power has decisively been shifted towards children or that it is equally exercised by both parents. Operational competence and technological development do not overcome the hierarchical parent-child relationship.[36] The overall authority still lies with the parents and they restrain the children in their viewing and resolve their conflicts over viewing choices. Television viewing is perceived to be under parental control and responsibility especially in regulating the amount of television viewing time.[37]

In addition to parental authority, television reinforces the prevailing power structure of the households. In fact, this has already been observed elsewhere by media scholars. Leoncio Barrios, for instance, noted that matriarchal power comes into play in television viewing in Venezuela[38] whereas David Morley has found just the opposite in Britain.[39] In the case of all the families in the present study, as I discussed in Chapter Five, patriarchal power prevails in television viewing.[40] Men, if present, have the last word on viewing choices and they wield the remote control, which I suggest becomes another power symbol in the domestic context. Women operate the television and handle the remote control only when they view on their own.

Television also reinforces the gender divide in terms of watching television programmes, I have argued in Chapter Five. This study, however, differs from some of the previous studies in suggesting that the gender divide is amplified in the

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[35] Jan-Uwe Rogge and Klaus Jensen. 1988. "Everyday Life and Television in West Germany: An Empathic-Interpretive Perspective on the Family as a System". In *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull. Newbury Park: Sage.

[36] Rogge and Jensen. "Everyday Life and Television in West Germany". p. 114

[37] For a discussion on television viewing as a parental responsibility in the United States, see Stewart M. Hoover, Lynn Schofield Clark and Diane F. Alters. 2004. *Media, Home, and Family*. New York: Routledge.

[38] Barrios. "Television, Telenovelas, and Family Life in Venezuela". p. 72

[39] David Morley. 1986. *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Comedia.

[40] 5.4

emotional response to programmes rather than in the categorisation and respective viewing of programmes as feminine and masculine, or factual and fictional.[41]

The generational divide is an aspect of domestic life that television has reinforced. In Chapters Four and Five, I have demonstrated the sharp contrast in the preferences and media practices of the elders and their grandchildren. While the old are still respected and obeyed in watching television, I have shown that there is a marked difference between them, their children and grandchildren in their preferences and television use. The elder members prefer to read and hear news whereas interest in news is the thing their grandchildren show least. Unlike the old and retired in other places who are said to like television,[42] the Marthoma elders, especially the old women, said that they are not very keen on watching television except for news and religious programmes. They also refrain from operating the set. In comparison, the inclination to watch television seems to increase with the generations. The elders in the family watch television rarely whereas their children watch more, surpassed only by their children who watch most. The operational competence and media proficiency of the children also ensures that the generation gap is retained if not increased.

So far I have been highlighting the change and continuity that television has brought into the households. In the case of some other practices, however, I found from this study that, television retains and changes at the same time. One such practice, as I analysed in Chapter Six, is eating.[43] Television relocates the family during mealtime in many houses, but does not change what is eaten. In other words, despite watching television even at meal times, when it comes to the food and purchasing habits of the households, television is said to have only marginal or no influence at all. Marthomites in this study rarely buy food items because of television advertisements and in major purchasing, especially household gadgets, they claimed to rely on their previous experience or a reference group rather than television. Another practice in this regard is playing, where television makes different impact. When it comes to children's play the practice continues but the nature of play changes. I argued that the

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[41] 5.3.2.2

[42] David Gauntlett and Annette Hill. 1999. *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge and British Film Institute. p. 40. Nilanjana Gupta. 1998. *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 116. See also 5.3.3

[43] 6.3

children in this study are not "couch potatoes" (or "couch *pakodas*") as they continue to play in the evenings and weekends despite the presence of television at home.[44] However, the influence of television may be lurking behind the popularisation of cricket over other games.

Despite the varying impact of television on their daily life Marthomites are not overtly bothered by accepting television as a domestic medium. The attention given to television in terms of space and time may suggest that television has become the principal mass medium in the household. They do not look down upon television when compared with other media and seem to disagree with all those who caricature television as a monster or in Justin Lewis's words an octopus "whose tentacles squirmed into almost every avenue of our cultural life."[45] Except in the case of children's studies and prayer time in few cases, the families appeared to be very relaxed about television and its influence. They are not worried about the reduction in their sleeping time or that mealtime has become television time. Watching television even at the cost of family prayer or the relocation of prayer time in the daily schedule may show the precedence television has been accorded in the Marthoma households. They like to watch television and are willing to make adjustments in their daily routine. Television has come to stay!

iv Television and religion

This research had families from three different religious traditions watching multi-religious programmes on television, and providing thereby an opportunity to fill some of the gaps that I identified in the current media and religion debate. One of the questions I raised in this regard concerns the way families across religions watch television and the role religion plays in watching television in a multi-religious context. This study revealed "surprising similarities"[46] with which Marthoma, Hindu and Muslim families perceive and use television. With regard to secular television there was nothing much to distinguish the Marthomites from the Hindu or Muslim families and this explains why there are only a few places in this study where they

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[44] 6.9

[45] Justin Lewis. 1991. *The Ideological Octopus: An exploration of Television and Its Audience*. New York: Routledge. p. 4

[46] See Jolyon Mitchell. 2003. "Emerging Conversations in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture". In *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage. London: T&T Clark. p. 338

had to be differentiated on a religious basis. The similarity in their television practice is basically because, for the most part, it is their overarching socio-cultural identity, exemplified in their preference for vernacular language, among other things I discussed in Chapter Five, that comes into play in television viewing, rather than their distinct religious identity.

The religious identity of the families is amplified mainly in watching religious programmes and even then it results in remarkably similar patterns, though with different results, across the religious divide. All families, irrespective of their religious distinctions and as demonstrated in Chapter Seven, were united in demarcating television programmes into secular and religious, and in asserting that non-religious (secular) television programmes are insufficient to evoke any thinking about God.[47] Religion, in short, is hardly thought to relate to the news or to entertainment programmes. This raises significant differences and counter points to the many postulations of media-religion scholars.

Unlike the suggestion of many polemicists and apologists,[48] the families in this study do not consider secular television to have a religious dimension or mythic function. They reported gaining religious meanings from explicitly religious programmes alone, and that too of one's own religion. Even when programmes of other religions are watched because of their familiarity or in order to know more about certain observances of their neighbours, the interview participants do not consider themselves loyal viewers of such programmes nor do they consider watching them as occasions to think of God. The maximum such programmes can evoke is thinking about the other's God and religion, not of one's own.

The expression of a sense of ownership towards programmes of one's own religion and a lack of interest in programmes of other religions[49]is in congruence with the everyday life of the families in this study, I suggest. In a multi-religious context there is usually friendly relationship with neighbours of other religion/s and familiarity with some of their religious beliefs and practices. But, even then they desist from participating in each other's worship or the sharing of faith. This perhaps explains why Marthomites were interested in watching at least some episodes of *Ramayan* or

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[47] 7.2

[48] Introduction (v.ii.i), (v.ii.ii)

[49] 7.2.3.2

Sri Ayyappan but not the temple worship or festivals like *Ponkala*. Hindus and Muslims on the other hand said that they have watched some episodes on Jesus, but were hesitant to watch televangelism. In other words stories of other religions are accepted as part of the social and cultural environment whereas others' religious practices are eschewed, as in everyday life.

Television, as discussed in Chapter Seven, does not open up dialogue between religious groups but only reinforces their respective religious identities. This finding adds voice to the criticism of *Doordarshan* for helping the majority religious group in India.[50] *Doordarshan* has not opened up much possibility of dialogue or better understanding of Hindu religion among the non-Hindu audiences. What it has done is to reinforce the religious identity of the Marthomites and Muslims.[51] Considering the fact that each religious group in this study has shown an inclination to see programmes of its own religion, it can be argued that television, especially *Doordarshan*, by telecasting Hindu religious serials day after day may provide an opportunity for the not-so organised Hindus to amplify their religious identity. The boycott of *Doordarshan* by the Marthoma and Muslim families expresses their anger at the promotion of the majority religion and marginalisation of minority religious communities in India. This raises important policy questions for public service broadcasting there.

I claim in this thesis that television has not replaced religion. Even though prime time television is conceded to have the potential to alter prayer time in the evenings, it has not compromised family devotion, corporate worship and cottage prayer meetings of most of the families in this study. Religion and television are considered to be different for the most part without having any influence on each other. Even religious television is not regarded as a major resource of religion or a substitute for traditional religious practices. Televangelism on Sundays may cater to the elderly and sick members of the family rather than those who can and want to participate in church worship.[52] Church still remains a source of meaning and identity or to maintain the Marthomites as an interpretive community.[53] In this sense, the lament of a catholic

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[50] 1.3.3

[51] 7.2.2

[52] 7.2.3.2

[53] Introduction (iv)

colleague cited in the beginning of this study[54] that the remote control has replaced the rosary appears, on the basis of this study, an exaggeration.

Most of the media, religion and culture debate, especially in the West has assumed, perhaps rightly, that modernity and secularisation caused the decline of religion and that television performs a religious or quasi-religious role.[55] India is not secularised in the way that other places like Europe or Britain are. In such places secularisation has led to religion being made insignificant or worse.[56] From the present study, I argue that in Kerala, people seem to be able to buy into a central part of modernity in an unqualified way. Even though the implied definitions and consequent demarcation of television programmes into religious and non-religious (secular) by the families may modify my initial suggestion that in India there is "nothing that is completely secular and nothing that is exclusively religious,"[57] television viewing has not been considered to have replaced religious practices. Despite secularisation, "the social significance of religion"[58] still persists and people show the capability to make distinctions between religious and secular without eroding religion. Religious practices are deeply ingrained which may in part suggest the resilience of Indian cultures and also the seriousness with which religion is still regarded. In Kerala traditional religion (prayer time) continues to play an influential role even in the use of television (prime time).

Marthomites, in other words, are neither polemicists nor apologists in their approach to television. The entry of television into the Marthoma households, which is something unique to capture in this study because of its recent spread, shows that the Marthomites welcomed television to their households. They had no religious qualms about buying a set and they went to great lengths to procure a set which pleased them. Television in this sense is not bought casually and does not have many

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[54] Introduction (i)

[55] Introduction (v.ii.i)

[56] Even in some countries in the West, for instance, in the United States, secularisation is not complete as it thought to be. See Stewart M. Hoover. 1993. "Privatism, Authority and Autonomy in American Newspaper Coverage of Religion: The Readers Speak". In *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Chris Arthur. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. p. 274

[57] Introduction (ii)

[58] Lynn Schofield Clark and Stewart M. Hoover. 1997. "At the Intersection of Media, Culture, and Religion: A Bibliographical Essay". In *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby. Thousand Oaks: Sage. p. 16. Also see, Introduction (v.ii)

"negative" public scripts.[59] Again, they do not perceive television as a great threat or natural competitor to their religion and the notion of each being different may have greatly enhanced their confidence in managing television. This may perhaps explain Marthomites' lack of sympathy for the position of some polemicists who want the church to discourage the use of television.[60] They even hinted, as mentioned in Chapter Seven, their opposition by saying that they are not going to heed even if the Marthoma church takes such a course. Similarly, unlike the apologists, Marthomites neither celebrate television as a blessed instrument for evangelism nor denigrate it as Satan's tool. They, at best, can be considered dialogists because of their "intentional and sophisticated"[61] engagement with television. They claim to be comfortable in handling television despite giving indications that as a new practice television viewing is a parental issue and an area of conflict, if only on a few occasions. In other words, unlike what some of the media literacy advocates have suggested, audiences like the Marthomites do not perceive themselves to be victims of television who need protection, or potential victims needing inoculation.[62] In short, Marthomites do not consider television to have altered their faith/practices and claim to have accommodated and adapted television viewing into their domestic life without being extreme opponents or enthusiastic proponents.

v Implications and need for further research

What has been said so far does not mean that television has no influence on the religion and culture of the Marthoma families. Even though the televangelism programmes on Sundays have not been watched attentively in all families or credited with having contributed much to their faith, the willingness to watch them and the eagerness to have more Christian programmes on television, as discussed in Chapter Seven, signal important shifts in Marthoma culture. On the one hand this indicates an acceptance of an image based symbolic resource into an otherwise highly word-oriented religious culture. I have mentioned a number of times in this thesis that Marthomites harbour objections to films. Even though no families expressed it,

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[59] For a different finding in the United States, see Lee Hood. 2004. "Fitting with the Media: The Price-Benoits and the Franzes". In *Media, Home, and Family*. p. 131

[60] Introduction (v.ii.iv)

[61] Joseph G. Champ. 2004. ""Couch Potatodom" Reconsidered: The Vogels and the Carsons". In *Media, Home, and Family*. p. 169. Also see 5.5

[62] Introduction (v.ii.iv)

considering their religious tradition purposefully devoid of images,[63] one would suspect an aversion to images lurking behind their avoidance of films. Marthomites, however, have not shown any reservations in seeing the image of Jesus or the serialisation of Bible stories on television. Television, in this sense, accentuates a shift towards an image based religious resource in the household initiated by the arrival of mass-produced pictures and paintings of Christ during the last two or three decades. Domestic religiosity, as a result, has come to incorporate images in an unprecedented way and in contrast to the bare image-less interior of the church buildings. Has it softened the religious posturing of a reformed tradition suspicious of images like that of the Marthomites? How does this modernity with audio-visual materials which have gained entry and acceptance in the Marthoma households influence their religious imagination and participation? I have suggested in Chapter Seven that while some of the elders would still like to retain a bare image-less altar and church interior perhaps to maintain the distinction of their public worship places from their iconographic neighbours, their grandchildren are very enthusiastic about having visual images in worship places.[64] This is a significant finding.

While not subscribing to the notion of television as *paedocratic* (considering it predominantly to be a children's medium) I acknowledge in this thesis a generational divide within the households in their use of television. Even though none of the interview participants was born into a television environment earning television the witty designation of a "third parent," it is children who are growing up with television. Middle aged Marthomites (like myself) have grown up mostly in image-less domestic spaces, but their children are surrounded with many images from landscapes, photographs, religious calendars, paintings, posters of Marthoma Bishops to religious television.[65] This might prompt them to take images for granted as part of domestic religiosity without any recourse to a cultural memory of the abhorance of images and may have interesting consequences for the religious life of the Marthomites. If the middle aged Marthomites have come to accept religious images at home and on television, their children might welcome them as part of the public religious places as well. In this thesis I have only provided glimpses of this

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[63] 2.2

[64] 7.2.3.2

[65] 3.3

change in terms of popular cultural engagement and the growing appreciation of visual media in religious practices. Further research using a focus group approach with the teenagers is needed to understand the influence of audio-visual material on their religious experience and imagination. A consideration of whether the youngsters, more familiar with pictures, paintings and colourings in schools, Sunday schools and vacation Bible schools, are "impoverished"[66] in being denied visual materials in public worship could be a starting point for this research. Such research may also produce insights which would complement and challenge works elsewhere by scholars rethinking approaches to visual communication in the reformed tradition and theology.[67]

In addition to the acceptance of audio-visual articulation of religion, the inclination to Christian television programmes reveals another move beyond the bounded identity of denominational Christianity of Marthoma Christians and exclusive reliance on its conventional and institutional resources. Presently television programmes are made not on a denominational basis but by televangelists as part of their evangelistic activities. Marthomites watching these programmes show a willingness to accept religious resources outside the confines of the Marthoma Church. Television, thus, may increase the choices of religious resources and thereby flatten denominational boundaries. These resources may either complement or compete with the traditional Marthoma resources. Whether their reception would be conditioned by their theological persuasion or their denominational affiliation can only be understood with further research taking a variety of Christian television programmes across the denominational and theological divide. Even though not a current possibility, there are chances that such an opportunity may arise in the future if more channels like the recently started *Jeevan* TV telecast Christian programmes to the Marthoma and other Christian households.

Beyond the bounded denominational identity, television also seems to break the religious/cultural boundary of the Marthomites. Watching television, I have

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[66] Peter G. Horsfield. 1993. "Teaching Theology in a New Cultural Environment". In *Religion and the Media: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Chris Arthur. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. See Introduction (v.ii.iv)

[67] For instance, David Morgan. 1999. *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production*. New York: Oxford University Press, David Morgan. 2002. "Protestant Visual Practice and American Mass Culture". In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark. New York: Columbia University Press.

suggested, symbolises a break with the cultural past of the Marthomites. Marthoma visual culture (or lack of it) must be seen against the iconographic legacy of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism – as well as the iconic background of neighbouring Christian Syrian Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism, as suggested in Chapter Two. Kerala (Indian) culture/s is steeped in performing arts with strong visual elements, from Hindu religious epics, *Kathakali*, to street theatre.[68] I wonder whether television, influenced by this visual culture, is giving Marthomites recourse to a repressed cultural past. In other words, are Marthomites (and of course, Muslims) perhaps rediscovering—via TV—some of their buried Indian cultural-religious roots, which are visually enshrined? If this should be the case, it will indeed be a profound culture shift for them. The present study gives some indications in this direction. A combination of the content analysis of the telecast of fine or popular arts, performing arts, dance and drama on television and their reception by Marthomites may shed new light on the attitude of Marthomites to many traditional art forms previously shunned because of their association with the Hindu religion.

On the basis of this study I argue that the Marthoma church needs to engage with television. There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, as I have demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, the families in this study have clearly indicated that television has become their principal and dominant window on the world when compared with newspaper and radio. As television has become the main news and information medium, church cannot abstain from it. The church needs to be on television as part of occupying the public space, if only to reinforce her presence rather than to increase her profile. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the willingness of Marthomites to consider Christian television programmes as an additional source of faith points to the need for the church to have a proactive approach towards television which is something the Marthoma church is yet to initiate. Such an involvement in the television medium will also be an acknowledgement of the culture shift of her members and their engagement with popular culture which is mainly audio-visual in nature.

This proposal, however, needs some qualification. The lack of loyalty among the families in this study to religious programmes other than their own is a pointer to the

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[68] For a discussion on Theatre and its significance for Christians, see Kuruvilla George. 1999. From People's Theatre to People's Eucharist: Resources from Popular Theatre for Eucharistic Reform in the Church of South India, Kerala State. PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh.

fragility of the high hopes of televangelists (apologists) in using television as a grand tool for evangelism and conversion. One could question whether pumping money into televangelism with an eye on conversion or propaganda is a viable model for the church, considering what the families had shared with me. The families in this study have witnessed only the beginning of the telecasting of Christian religious programmes. So far they have not attracted much attention and the possibility of using television to reach the unreachable is yet to be proved. It may reach only those who have already been reached or the sick and the old. So what I propose is a realistic involvement of the church in televangelism with an aim to provide a devotional medium for Christians with a modest, attractive presentation of Christian faith. This may then be helpful for others to have a more authentic understanding of Christian faith. There are important missiological questions too, especially in a context where Hindu and Christian religious channels are emerging, of late, in India.[69]

Another area which needs further exploration is the challenge of television to the Marthoma Church and its practices. From the church's perspective it is time to accept that television has become part of the Marthoma families and it has come to stay. How does the church understand her role in this culture shift from a word-oriented to an audio-visual culture? What are its implications for theological education and pastoral strategy? How does the church take notice of this shift in its communication with her members and to the public?[70]

The Marthoma Church considers morning and evening family prayer to be one of the essential features of Marthoma spirituality. This research has shown that even without the influence of television, morning family prayers have been on the decline in many households and television has come to relocate evening family prayer in most families. What can the church do in this situation? Worrying evidence of television viewing penetrating to the practice of family prayer in a few families at

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[69] There are efforts to start a Malayalam channel by the Indian Union Muslim League, a political party but mostly representing the interests of Muslims.

[70] The Marthoma Church has started acknowledging the influence of television and other media on people's lives. Efforts in this direction include setting up of a Commission on Media in 2000 by the General Assembly of the Church. This commission identified the need for media education. As part of this campaign, conferences and seminars devote time to discussing media related issues. For instance the Annual Clergy conference (2004) deliberated on *Madhyamangalile Naithikatha* (Ethical issues in Media).

least, demands conscious decision making and a media plan from the church and families. The pastoral policies of the church should necessarily reflect the role of television in people's life.

In this thesis I have primarily focussed on the Marthoma families living in Kerala. How those Marthomites who are migrant workers outside Kerala and in the diaspora watch television is a question worth exploring to gain insights into the way Marthoma identity is negotiated in relation to television. Similarly, as I have focussed more on beliefs and practices, one of the issues I have not been able to pursue in detail is the question of values. Perhaps a research on values will reveal whether television propagates any myths contrary to gospel values and if so whether audiences have made conscious efforts to understand such issues.

vi Conclusion

Lessons are learnt from this study on the way Marthomites have incorporated television without seriously undercutting their everyday practices and religion. The insights from this study confirm, complement and challenge the present media, religion and culture debate and advance it in many ways.

Marthomites (like the Hindu and Muslim families in this study), do not perceive television as a "Trojan horse" or watching television as an "amusement leading them to death."[71] While the Marthomites are able for the most part to keep the prime time and prayer time intact, there are times when they interact and influence each other. Television viewing in Marthoma homes, thus, is a story of continuity and change symbolising a dynamic interaction between television, religion and everyday life.

[71] See Introduction (v.ii.i) for the references.

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